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CEREBUS WORLD TOUR

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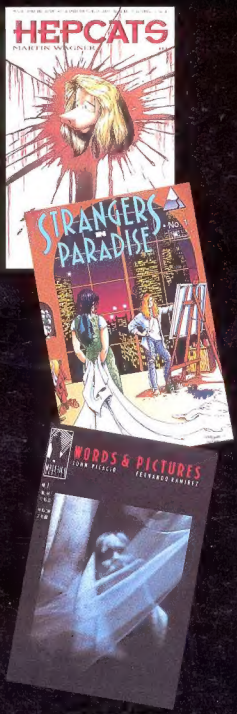

(see back cover for details)

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CEREBUS mothers & daughters

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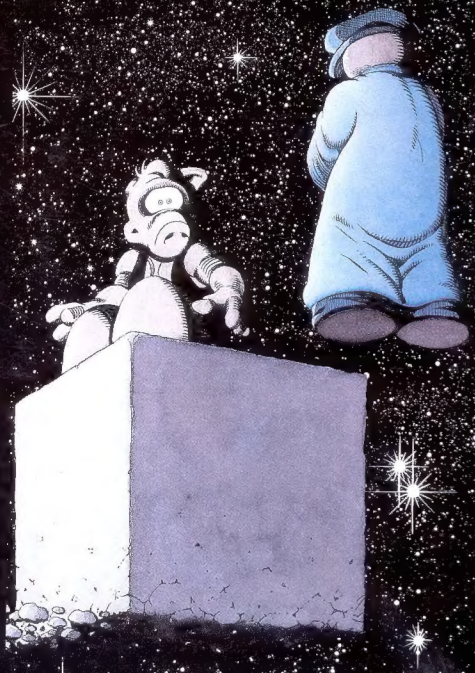

190
JAN

CEREBUS
NO. 190 JANUARY 1995

THE BIG

DAVE SIM
Creator, Writer, Characters/ pencil & ink, lettering

GERHARD
Background Artist/pencil & ink, cover colourist, mechanical tones

CAROL WEST
Administrative Assistant

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

DIANA SCHUTZ
Proofreading

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

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BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
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BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to Cerebus 200)
Minds

MONTHLY
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I was so busy finishing up issue 191 (this is being written November 18) that I hadn't really had a chance to focus on the SPIRITS response that's been coming in, which is nothing short of phenomenal. As I sifted through the foot-high stack of mail, I kept running across cheques. A rough estimate tells me that we've already got nearly a third of the available tables booked, two weeks before the initial deadline I had set of November 30.

SPIRITS OF INDEPENDENCE is not an aesthetic or philosophical movement — it is essentially an act of war declared upon the comic-book status quo, hence the changes in the format of *Cerebus* for the duration of 1995.

Welcome to the War Room.

Okay, here's our situation: the goal is to replace the company-centered mentality with self-publishing. We are facing a much larger force. They are numerous but they don't fight very well because, basically, they aren't fighting *for* anything. Their situation is similar to the French (and later American) experience in Vietnam. They don't belong here and they don't really want to *be* here (they want to be in Hollywood), so, eventually, they'll get tired and go home. Since their primary (virtually exclusive) interest is in making money, their emphasis is on closing big deals in Hollywood and with merchandising companies. Their secondary purpose is to capture opposing shares of the market, so they have most of their time and attention and resources devoted to this front over here: the teen-age, super-hero market. Tactically they function around a 'franchise offence': *X-Men, Star Wars, Batman.* If it sells well, they expand the number of titles centered on the franchise, which strains their resources (available talent, promotions budget, etc.). Cumulatively the franchise does better than the initial title, but each new title divides the market share for the franchise across too many titles, entropy sets in and the momentum is lost. In self-publishing, this can best be seen in the difference between Rob Liefeld's Extreme Studios and Todd McFarlane's Todd McFarlane Productions. *Spawn* outsells each book in the *Youngblood* line by a wide margin, but, cumulatively, the *Youngblood* line outsells *Spawn* by a wide margin. The franchises expand quickly and contract quickly, which compels their owners to try to generate momentum by dramatic changes. Mike Carlin was successful with this (on behalf of Time-Warner) on the *Death of Superman* sequence, Denny O'Neil less so with the *Azrael* extended story line: neither of them has had a great track record since then (*relatively* speaking, which is the only language corporations know: what have you done for us lately?). The War never ends, so these Big Pushes involve an endless cycle of capturing and losing territory. Marvel is getting cut to pieces on all sides because all of their resources have been moved to this front over here: Hollywood and merchandising. They bought the Malibu mercenaries because they have shared goals: holding the parameter in the direct market, digging in and fortifying the work-made-for-hire line, and taking whatever is working the best and moving it up to the Hollywood/merchandising front. Mike Richardson is playing both sides, moving what has worked on the Hollywood/ merchandising front (*Star Wars, Aliens*) and using comic-book adaptations of them to maintain his own work-made-for-hire line. In moving his resources the other way, he has had his best success with *The Mask*, but now he's faced with supply-line problems. *The Mask* has to be followed up with a series of hits against the Hollywood/merchandising line to maintain the territory he's captured. On this front down here, quality comics, he has two of the best field commanders, Diana Schutz and Bob Schreck. Creative people will fight under their command without question. They don't bullshit the troops. 'Here's the supply tent, here's what the situation board looks like, here's your rifle, start shooting.' The only comparable figure at the field-commander level is Karen Berger. Let her pick her people, give her a set of binoculars and an objective, and she'll get the job done. Again, creative people fight under her command without question. As a *division* commander, she's vulnerable (I'm reminded of the stories of JFK in conference with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, moving around divisions as if they were PT boats, making it obvious that his command experience was, to say the least, severely limited). She has a core group of the best fighting creators we've got (Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison, etc., etc.) but she now has carte blanche to expand her forces, and the men and women out on the flanks are being cut to pieces. I expect that her field commanders (the under-editors at Vertigo) are lying to her: feeding her a line of happy-time bullshit. The reports coming back to HQ are not matching her

PICTURE

optimistic projections. She isn't in danger of losing her command, but Neil's going stateside soon and there's no New Neil coming up through the ranks. He's promised to come back for a series of campaigns (the Delirium mini-series, etc.) and she has to figure out her strategy around those events without REALLY knowing when they're going to happen (a winter campaign? Summer? Fall? Next year? The year after?). Todd McFarlane is the most interesting (yeah, even now. Surprise, surprise). He's still just running a platoon of hand-picked guys. He spent way too many resources (time, talent, credibility) last year on the *Spawn/Batman*, *Batman/Spawn* thing, but he learned a valuable lesson: how long he can be gone from the front before the forward momentum starts to slow down and grind to a halt. He's fighting the same two-front campaign: comic books and Hollywood/ merchandising. When he turns the artillery over to Greg Capullo or Alan Moore or Neil Gaiman, he knows just about how long they can hold his position for him. He attacks the Hollywood/merchandising front like a maniac and then goes back to the comic-book front. Jeff Smith is in the same situation, potentially. He's occupied a lot of territory very quickly and everyone else's guns are facing away from him, since they all had it marked on their maps as uninhabitable swampland. His position is the strongest and most secure. He's thinking a lot about the Hollywood/merchandising front and trying to decide if he just wants to hold his position, take more territory or divide his resources (time, talent, credibility) between the comic-book front, mainstream-bookstore front (almost everyone has written this off as a quagmire: Kitchen Sink and Tundra lost whole divisions and seriously weakened their position on the comic-book front. If they're buying them at B. Dalton's, they ain't buyin' 'em at Comic Relief) and Hollywood/ merchandising. If he chooses to hit the Hollywood line (which he knows far better than Todd), it won't be as a maniac; it will be surgical. He lacks Todd's expertise at overcoming deadline pressure (learned at Marvel) on the comic-book front, but this can only improve with time. Expectations for the *Bone* comic have created internal pressures that he has to get on top of. Self-consciousness will give way to self-confidence. Because the division commander, field commander, troops and supply line are all contained in one individual (himself), even if his front-line position weakens a bit he's still got the largest chunk of territory of any individual since Wendy Pini (and, later, Kevin Eastman and Pete Laird).

Now, where do *we* fit in on the situation board?

Right down here. The soft underbelly of the comic-book front. We don't have to worry about getting back and forth between the Hollywood/merchandising line and the teen-age, super-hero line or trying to decide how to distribute our resources between the two fronts. Here's you just starting out. Every issue you put out, you start moving up the beach. You start out up to your knees in water. The way things are going right now, you go from being up to your knees in water, to mid-thigh, to waist, to rib cage, to chest. Your circulation keeps going down. Now, here's a more detailed map. This is Drew Hayes of *Poison Elves*. Right here, around six months ago, he was up to his forehead in water. He tilted his head back, kept his rifle and ammo up in the air, and now he's at a point where the water is only up to his shoulders. Now there's a soldier. He didn't panic, or if he did, he didn't let it affect his performance. Calls his publishing company Mulehide Graphics. 'Mule hide' is right. He hasn't moved very *far*, but his back-issue sales have moved him forward because he has seventeen of them (three of them sold out). The forward momentum is stronger than the pressure to wash him out to sea. When a wave pushes him back a few feet, he remembers what it was like to have the water lapping around his nostrils, and that feeds his determination. His trade paperback will put him squarely on the sand and (as long as he doesn't get crazy) he'll just keep moving up from there.

In the middle of a war, the worst thing you can do is panic. Your forward momentum depends on getting your books out on time and making them better as you go along. What is your situation? Are you starving to death? Are you interned in a prisoner-of-war camp? Are you covered in lice, suffering from malaria? Are your arms and legs covered with open, running sores? No? Then what are you whining about? Okay, you're looking up ahead six months and you can see a day when the line representing your declining sales will intersect with your fixed living costs, and you'll be bankrupt. Has that happened yet? What are you doing to turn things around? Are you crouched in your foxhole talking for hours with guys (and female guys) in the other foxholes on your radio-telephone about how hopeless everything is? Are you planning your line of retreat or are you planning an attack? If you're planning a retreat, brother (or sister), you can be damn sure that that's all you're going to do. If you've got a roof over your head, art supplies, a jar of peanut butter and a loaf of bread, and a tap you can get a glass of water from whenever you want, you've got all that you need. What you do with it is up to you.

★★★★★★★★★★

Okay, now we're going back to the big situation board. Let me just get this acetate overlay which represents everyone's munitions supply — the comic-book stores.

Now, look at this. These guys don't know WHAT the fuck they're doing. This big clump of them right here, they're all standing around Mike Carlin's position, waiting for him to come up with another *Death of Superman*. The red ones, near the center, are the ones who are out of business or going out of business. The blue ones represent the guys who are in trouble (oversized ones represent the chains of stores that are made up of three or more stores). They've pulled back a bit, but they keep moving back and forth between the Hollywood/merchandising front and the comic-book front (no, no — not the soft underbelly where *we* are, but the teen-age, super-hero market where all the *earthquakes* are). They're strung out in an uneven line and they just get picked off, one at a time. The red dots and the blue dots keep pushing for returnable comics, which means that a seventy-five percent sell-through is actually a fifty percent sell-through, since the returns have to come off the bottom line. Like I say, they don't know WHAT the fuck they're doing.

And then we have the orange dots. They're moving closer to our position, but most of them still want to be within sight of the Hollywood/merchandising line and the teen-age, super-hero market line. They don't (as they put it) 'want to put all their eggs in one basket'. *Most* of them put *most* of their eggs in baskets with holes in the bottom. They used to be good baskets and they're waiting for the holes in the

bottom to... heal or something. Like I say, they don't know WHAT the fuck they're doing.

Every once in a while there's a convulsion, and convulsions are coming closer together. More blue dots turn red and more orange dots turn blue. The distributors start to hemorrhage stores. Each store that files for bankruptcy represents for the distributor a three-month increase in inventory and loss of revenue. Yikes is right. We just went through a convulsion in December orders. Big drops across the board. As the saying goes, it hurts them worse than it does us. The distributors lose about seven-to-nine percent of stores in each convulsion. The pie gets smaller each time. *Spawn* is still the best-selling comic, but it used to sell a million-two and it now sells in the low three hundred thousands or high two hundred thousands. Sixty percent of the market has disappeared in a little under two years.

The question becomes: are we coming up on a Big Convulsion? If not, are the small convulsions going to get larger or smaller? Closer together or further apart? The thing we can't lose sight of as self-publishers is that the core demand (of whatever size) will continue to exist. A lot of trading-card stores have moved into the comic-book field. A lot of them have no idea what they're doing, but that has its good side and bad side from our standpoint. They're vulnerable to the changing trends and hype, but they also have fewer preconceptions than established comic-book stores. The same is true of entry-level stores that have been open less than two years. They haven't seen a *Death of Superman*. One of the hottest books they've got is *Bone* and as far as they know that's done by some guy in his basement in Columbus, Ohio.

Permit me to scratch my beard stubble at this point and roll up my pant leg to show you the eight-inch pink-and-white scars. See this? You don't remember, but there was a time when a black and white comic book with a colour cover wasn't a 'real' comic book. You don't face that now. If self-published books are not collectively 'hot', the concept is. *Bone, Strangers in Paradise, Cerebus, A Distant Soil* sell in a very respectable range. We've already passed most of the low-end Marvels and we're now selling in the range of mid-to-high-end Marvels. Each convulsion pushes us higher and pushes them lower.

If I had to guess if there's a big convulsion up ahead or a series of small convulsions, I would guess the small-convulsion scenario. This presents a remarkable opportunity for self-publishers. Let's take a look at a single battle that was fought recently. This is reprinted (without permission) from the inside front cover of M'Oak's (yes, THAT M'Oak) new title *Thieves & Kings* (issue two):

What amazes me is that the bulk of it all happened in one week.

You see, I had 8000 copies of the first issue delivered to my home and I spent a whole day sitting in the basement cutting down the boxes they came in to the correct size. And filling them up again with the right numbers of comics. And filling out the right brokerage forms. And putting the right labels on the right packages. I'd figured that the packaging and shipping might take me a couple of hours. Certainly no more than an afternoon.

It took two days. With no sleep in between them. Unbelievable.

You can do all the research in the world to prepare yourself for a job like this, but until you actually have to pry open a painted-shut basement window through which to move boxes, until you have to bike around town to hardware stores and postal outlets and copy shops and bank machines and be back home before the courier arrives — not until *then* do you appreciate the effort involved.

On the afternoon of the second day, when the courier finally came and took the whole mess off my hands, I paid a visit to my two local comics shops: The Shooting Star and Pandora's Box.

Neither of them had ordered my book, nor had they seen any of my promotional material. But they both bought a bunch of copies and put them on their racks. Good feeling, that. A guy named Shawn also gave me a stack of free boxes from the back of his store, boxes which were the right size for comics and didn't need cutting down. (He also single-handedly recommended and sold the first issue of *Thieves & Kings* to seven customers the very next day.) Shawn's a dude.

The following morning I set out and ripped around town with a box of books. I was intent on making certain that *Thieves & Kings* was being sold in every shop in the Toronto area. For whatever reason, probably because this is my home, it seemed really important that I do that. And so I hit something like twenty-five stores over a four-day period.

Now, twenty-five stores may not seem like very much, but holy smokes! There's a lot of pavement between twenty-five stores! And every time you walk through a door to introduce yourself and try to sell your work... Well, you all know how job interviews make you feel. Very similar. Six times a day.

Four of those stores had actually ordered the book through the official channels. (And, boy, I can't tell you how good it feels to walk into a shop you've never seen before in your life and have the proprietor already know who you are. Free extra copies to those folks!)

But, I'll tell you, not a single place I visited turned me away without putting *Thieves & Kings* on their racks. And I met some really nice people along the way. Despite what some folks say, this industry really is a fantastic thing.

'Cause, you see, the journey may break your feet and batter your heart and try to pull you down, but when it's all over, you can count your losses and add up your wins, and if you find you've come out ahead, then it's a wonderful sort of tired that draws you into sleep.

'Til January. See you all in issue #3.

Now THERE's a soldier. He doesn't have time to sit in his foxhole whining to his friends about how tough the market is. He's too busy getting out there and doing something about it. 'This industry really is a fantastic thing.' Don't believe it? Get out there and find out for yourself. You think *you* feel lost and alone? Imagine how a *retailer* feels. Every week, even his most recently formed theory of 'what's going on' gets blown into a million pieces. He's still firing his gun, but there's a lot of click click click click bang click click click BANG click click click click bang. Suddenly someone comes crawling up to his foxhole, jumps in and (wiping the sweat from his forehead) hands him some bullets and says, 'Y'wanna try some of these?' He looks at 'em for about two seconds and says, what the fuck. Can't be any worse than the shit ammo Marvel's been sending me. He squeezes the trigger twenty-five times and gets seven 'bangs' the first day. Y'know where I can get any more o' these? 'Fuck, yeah, I make 'em myself.'

Road trips. The army's getting smaller and everybody is cut off from everybody else. Look in the Yellow Pages and hit that beach. Most especially, find out if anyone has opened up *since* the Yellow Pages came out. Entry-level stores have less or no debt load and virtually no preconceptions. It's late 1994 (or early 1995 as you're reading this) and the *Death of Superman* happened about a dozen convulsions back. It's a Brave New World. *Carpe diem*. If the traditional supply lines aren't getting your bullets out to the front lines, get on your bike or in your car and get 'em out there yourself.

I still have to shake my head every time that spanking new jeep rolls up outside the *Cerebus* compound (with those cute little Image flags waving on the front), and the driver runs around to the side and snaps open the door, and out steps Larry Marder with that big-ass trenchcoat and the five polished stars on his cap. I mean, I just have to shake my

head, y'know? Anyway, I snap him my best West Point salute and open the door to the Quonset hut for him. 'After you, General.'

Once we're inside, it's just Dave and Larry (fortunately).

I have to give him high marks. He took one of the most undisciplined outfits in the field (they spent half of their time blowing big holes in Marvel's line and the other half blowing big holes in their own feet) and pulled it together. I understand better than most that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. We have very different pictures of what's going to happen up ahead. My philosophy comes down to preparing for the Worst Case scenario: the Big Convulsion comes and wipes out all of the big distributors (not to mention the little ones), ninety-five percent of the stores and the top ten companies, in terms of market share. Ger and I put away as much money as we can to see us through the four-to-six months it'll take to re-establish the supply lines to the survivors. Consequently, we're in good shape to survive any crisis that falls short of the Doomsday Scenario.

Larry's calling a lot of the shots from the third highest position in the whole global conflict. Tactically, he has to be concerned about the customer base shifting from the ten-to-twelve-year-olds to the sixteen-to-eighteen-year-olds over the last two years. The biggest threat to comics' traditional 'adolescent male power fantasy' base is computer games and (down the road) virtual reality. A fourteen-year-old boy can and will participate in kicking the shit out of some guy eight feet tall who's built like the Hulk. He doesn't just have to look at still pictures of it. We have to rely on the 'urge to participate in mayhem' expressing itself artistically. The ratio of boys who want to draw big-muscled conflict to those who just want the illusion of participation is not good — let's say one out of 500 (or thereabouts). Larry sees a need to build a structure that carries twelve-year-olds forward to *Cerebus* and *Sandman*. *Batman Adventures* fits in there, as (I suspect) do the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. This is not my fight, but I'm happy to throw in my two cents. My problem with Image (at this juncture) is the divided resources. Taking it as a given (which I don't, but for the sake of argument) that super-hero comics are necessary, that there is not enough reliable quality-comics material to support comic-book stores, six of the most popular Marvel creators going off and forming their own company to publish six titles was, to me, the perfect 'second front'. It reinforced that 'one creator, one comic book' was functional on a much larger chessboard. Which it was. Had it *remained* that way for two years, I could now look at the situation board and see if it was true that, if 'purity' is maintained, Marvel and DC will be virtually steamrollered out of existence. New companies would start on the same basis. The next five hottest guys form a coalition of self-publishing entities with a central business structure and so on. Image's Big Three, McFarlane, Liefeld and Lee, have, instead, imitated the mainstream approach: McFarlane and Lee with the big push against the Hollywood/merchandising line and Liefeld with the 'franchise offence'. As we've seen with the Turtles, there's a brief period when there is a simultaneous success in the comic-book world and the Hollywood/merchandising world, and then the latter supersedes the former. I think this is a hard and fast rule (Larry would maintain that it remains to be seen, which is 'whistling past the graveyard' to me) and a contributing factor to the convulsions — the stores' inability to recognize that the time to withdraw support is as the creator withdraws from the market. Cash in briefly at the flashpoint and then ditch it as fast as you can and look at what's starting to happen *in* the comic-book field. Same thing with the 'franchise offence'. Each new title weakens the franchise and becomes an inventory-and-ordering problem for the stores. To try to turn things around, the person controlling the franchise has to resort to dramatic changes, which improve things in the short term and worsen them in the long term.

Larry decided early on that he was interested in the comic-book end of Image. He would advise on the Hollywood/merchandising end of things, but his job was to make the comic books sell better, to give the guys who lacked historical perspective an historical perspective, to mend the bridges to the distributors and retailers, and to hold the alliance together wherever possible.

Fair enough.

But the overall momentum is in a different direction. The 'six creators, six books' thing is long gone and it ain't coming back. The longer Larry remains, reinforcing the idea that what's good for Hollywood/merchandising is good for comic books and vice versa, the more he becomes Terry Stewart or Tom DeFalco, managing the 'comic-book end of things'. It's no longer the dog and it ain't even an especially large tail. My suggestion? Talk to everyone with name value doing work-made-for-hire Extreme books, find out (no bullshit, now) who is interested in JUST doing really cool super-hero comics without the Hollywood/merchandising stuff, and get them out of there and start over again somewhere else on a 'one creator (or team of creators), one book' basis, with the agreement that anyone who moves over into merchandising or Hollywood goes someplace else with his comic book (like Image, say). Personally, I don't think Image would last six months without Larry there and I think his ability to set good overall course directions and put out brush fires would give a 'New Image' much better than a fighting chance. This would also put Liefeld, Lee and McFarlane into the 'Corrupt Mainstream' category and force them into the same defensive rationalisations of their greed (i.e., expanding the market, penetrating the mass consciousness, blah, blah, blah). A Dan Fraga or Stephen Platt could pound away at that position and capture all of the Big Three's 'quality comics' territory in six, maybe eight, months — essentially sticking Todd's toys up Todd's ass and making him like it.

Anyway, as Larry gets back into his jeep and rolls out towards Mainstream HQ, it's time to put away the Big Map and get back to our situation board over here. Still with me? Good.

Our advantage as a fighting force is that our numbers are growing. If the distributors and the stores aren't exactly paving our way (nor should they), they are definitely paying much closer attention. Our casualty rate is very, very high. For every five who even make it to the beach, maybe a hundred are washed out to sea never to be seen again (this is guesswork since there isn't anything remotely resembling a census of self-publishers). Of the five who make it to the beach, four of them will do themselves in in the first two years by not producing on time or spreading their resources too thin, frittering away their money, spending too much time and money and energy on conventions and trade shows. *Particularly* time and energy — a balance has to be struck and it's almost impossible to teach the hit-and-run mentality necessary. Switch to PR mode on the way to the con, switch to creative mode the minute you leave: sketch the next page you have to do when you get back, rough in some dialogue and FOR GOD'S SAKE forget about all the conversations you had and people you met. If you promised to send someone something or you got a proposal to look at, throw it in the pile of 'things to do' and get back to the drawing board. Cons and trade shows are very helpful but too often they are used as an excuse for complete inactivity for a week or more afterwards. The only thing that will save your ass is the next page and the next issue. If you thought your personal plan and approach were valid *going* to the event, they are just as valid *coming back*. Don't second-guess yourself. Go back to work immediately, even if you only get half a page done. And if you won't go back to work, MAKE yourself.

This, in case you missed it, is the segue into the Spirits of Independence. I am trying very hard to set up the simplest and most basic series of events possible. I am pissed off (yes, in advance) at the number of cartoonists who are

going to use their appearances as an excuse to slack off for a week or two after they get back. I am pissed off (yes, in advance) at the number of cartoonists who are going to make contact with other self-publishers, mini-comics and small-press guys (and whatever the female version of 'guys' would be — 'gal' sounds like Dale Evans, and 'dolls' and 'chicks' are verboten) and spend the next two weeks on the phone with each other, plotting a new coalition, blue-skying promotion ideas, swapping life stories, whining about how bad the market is — in short, doing everything except drawing and writing their damn books. I didn't learn how to switch modes from PR to creative at the drop of a hat until the '92 U.S. TOUR and then only because I had to — there just wasn't any margin for error. Let me conclude this thought by saying that the length of time it takes you to produce a usable finished page after arriving home is as good a yardstick as any of what your chances are of succeeding as a self-publisher.

In order to reduce my own workload on the events, further information is only going to be sent out to people who have sent in a cheque to reserve a table (local hotels with inexpensive rooms, contact retailer for the event, future plans, etc.). For most of the events, it looks like the tables are going to be booked in pretty short order, and what we have left over will go to the retailer who will be displaying self-published and small-press stuff.

Tactically, the Spirits of Independence is just an experiment with a new approach. I'm assuming that there are other Terry Moores and Paul Popes out there somewhere, either doing mini-comics or getting lost in the phone-book-sized catalogues. They might even be a year or two away from really making a try at an amphibious landing. But early on in this game, making the right contact, having the right retailer notice your work or having another self-publisher suggest an approach to getting the work seen can make all the difference. Given our high casualty figures, we have to adopt the approach of the Chinese army against MacArthur at Yalu. We have to be mobile, everything trimmed to the barest minimum, throwing ourselves at them, wave upon wave. It's important to remember that a lot of our casualties are *only* wounded. Guys like Jeff Nicholson get written off as MIA and then come roaring back years later just when we least expect it. I honestly don't know what happens when you put forty of us in a room for a day. I would venture to say that any retailer who bothers to show up has the right kind of aggressiveness in an uncertain market, trying to get the jump on his competition when it comes to up-and-coming self-published material. I don't think the day is far off when we could create enough pressure to get a 'one creator, one book' section in the catalogues as a self-publishing option. There is enough of a track record that self-published books are stronger in the back-issue market (at least for the first year or two) than most other material. Some sort of program whereby the distributors would list all back issues (up to, say, six or ten) in such a section would solve a number of problems and also create an incentive for creators to self-publish. I floated this as a trial balloon with both Diamond and Capital a couple of years back and (naturally) got little or no response. If, by the end of next year, there are even two dozen self-publishers with the commercial potential of Terry Moore or Colleen Doran, then we make the 'one creator, one book' approach that much more secure and its viability that much easier to demonstrate. If, instead of being lumped in with 'Other' when it comes to market share, we can be identified as what we are, I think we will have reached a plateau. And if that 'pie slice' shows genuine growth over six months or a year, then we will have some real momentum. We have a number of distinct advantages, most especially the 'Start Me Up' syndrome. Once a self-publisher even has the smallest toehold in the market, there is very little incentive for them to leave and do something else. A lot (perhaps most) become unreliable at that point — their own worst enemy — but the ones who *do* prove to be reliable represent a profit center that is getting larger when most other profit centers are getting smaller. It's our advantage but an advantage has to be *pressed* to make a difference. We're all helping each other out as best we can, swapping ads and information. Preston Sweet made a big contribution with his '40 and 5' program. I'm doing what I can with the 'Note from the President' and the *Cerebus* Preview section. *Hero Illustrated* and *Wizard* have done a lot to legitimize our approach by covering it the same as they do the mainstream.

Jeff Smith, with *Bone*, has made the biggest contribution of all. When he begged off participating in the Spirits of Independence, I reassured him of that fact. By the time Kevin and Peter were entering their third year, the complete gravitation to Hollywood/merchandising was already in motion, ghost writers and ghost artists an inevitability. I doubt that the idea of getting others to do *Bone* for him has occurred to Jeff, but even if it were to happen tomorrow, his sticking with the 'one creator, one book' approach for this long has proven a point and paved the way for others. His success has done more for self-publishing in two years than have seventeen years of *Cerebus* and it's a debt that self-publishing will never be able to repay. Signing his name for six hours at a time in different cities isn't what he needs right now. Never having had that kind of explosive success and forward momentum, I wouldn't know how to advise him, but I certainly wish him every success with whatever mix of comic books, Hollywood and mainstream he chooses.

I asked Paul Pope to step in as the 'central guy' in Columbus and he's agreed. People interested in contacting him about the Columbus stop can write to him at:

HORSE PRESS
P.O. Box 3112
Columbus, Ohio 43210-0112

After attempting to come up with my own 'Spirits of Independence' logo, I've decided it would be better and more in keeping with the... uh... spirit of the thing to have anyone who wants to do a print or whatever make up their *own* 'Spirits of Independence' logo. I'll be happy to photocopy them and send them out to everyone who's bought a table and leave the choice of using one of them or doing one of their own up to the individual.

Likewise with the press release end of things. For good or ill, you'll hear about anything that's going on right here in *Cerebus*. I'd like to thank everyone who sent in a mailing list of mini-comics creators and self-publishers, and encourage you, again, to photocopy any of the information on the Spirits of Independence and send it to anyone you think might be interested.

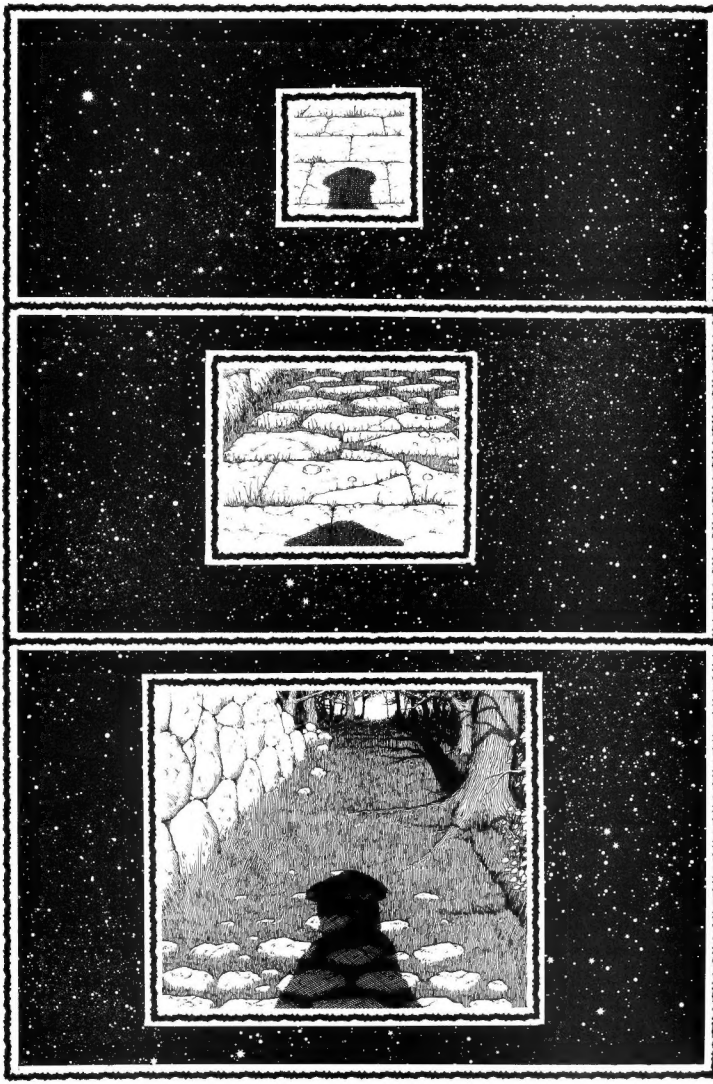
★★★★★★★★★★

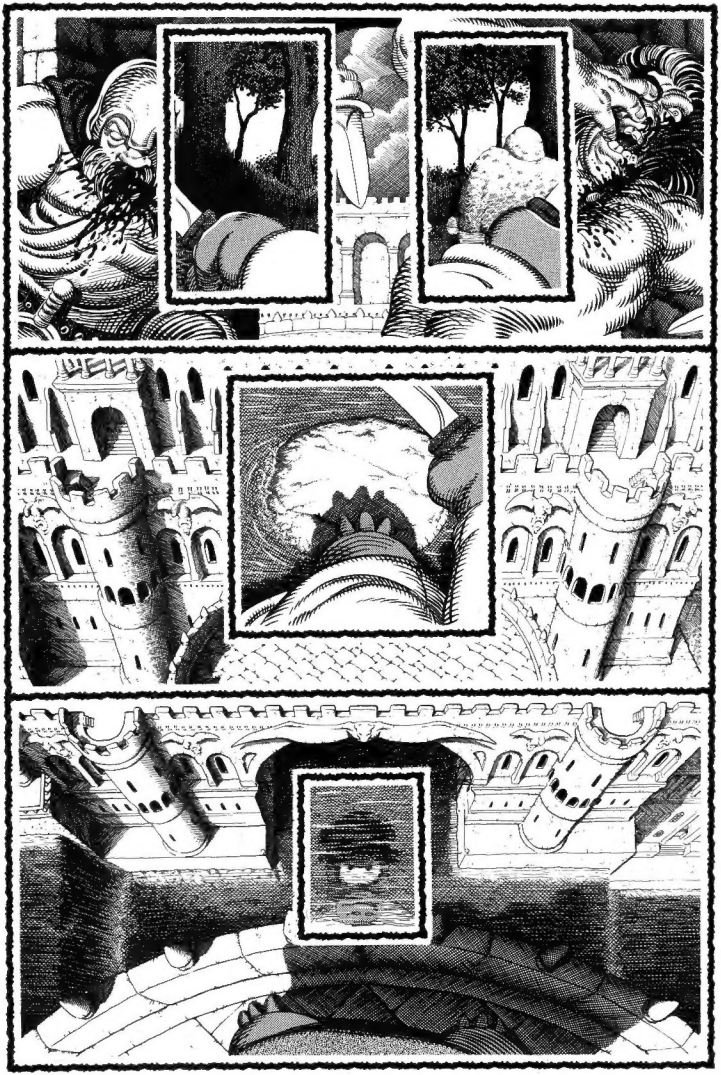
Okay, that was more than a little long-winded, but I thought it was time to bring everyone up to speed on how things look from this particular crow's-nest. I'm not saying that self-publishing has become the land of milk and honey, but I thought it was worth showing you my personal 'big picture'. There's a lot more cause for optimism now than at any time in the recent past. I'm sure there'll be a lot of screw-ups at the first few stops. None of us participating in and organizing these things has ever done it before. If you expected to hear from me and it's two months or less until the announced date for your town, give me a call. My little scraps of paper have an annoying habit of going AWOL.

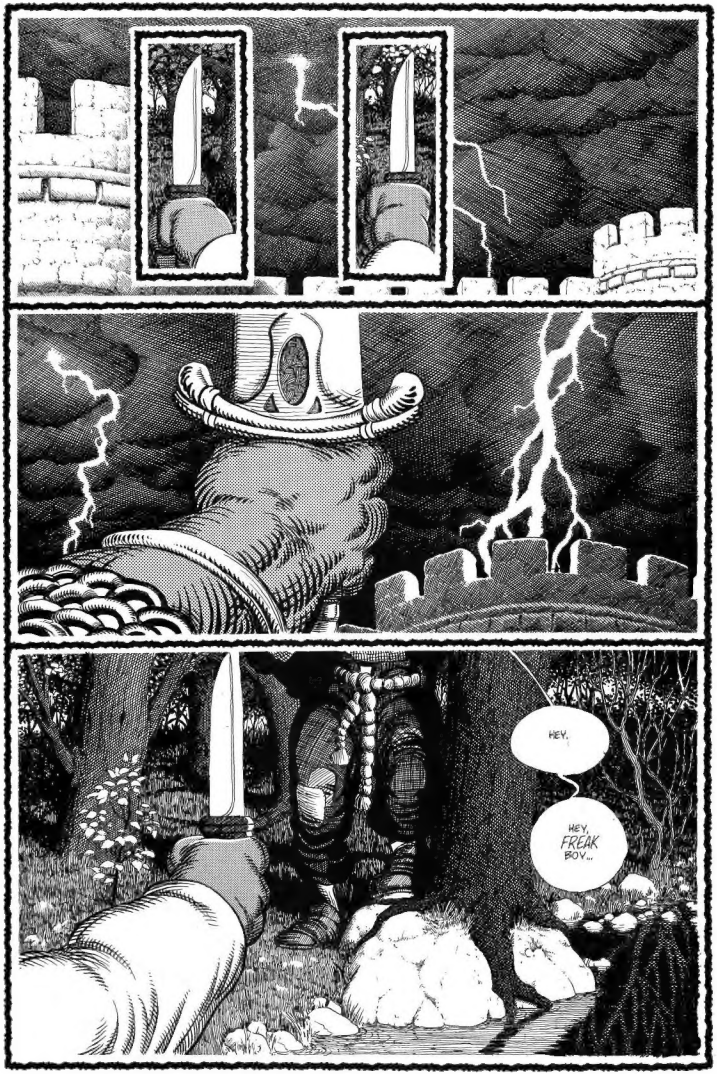
Apart from that, the biggest contribution you can make is to do the next page and publish the next issue.

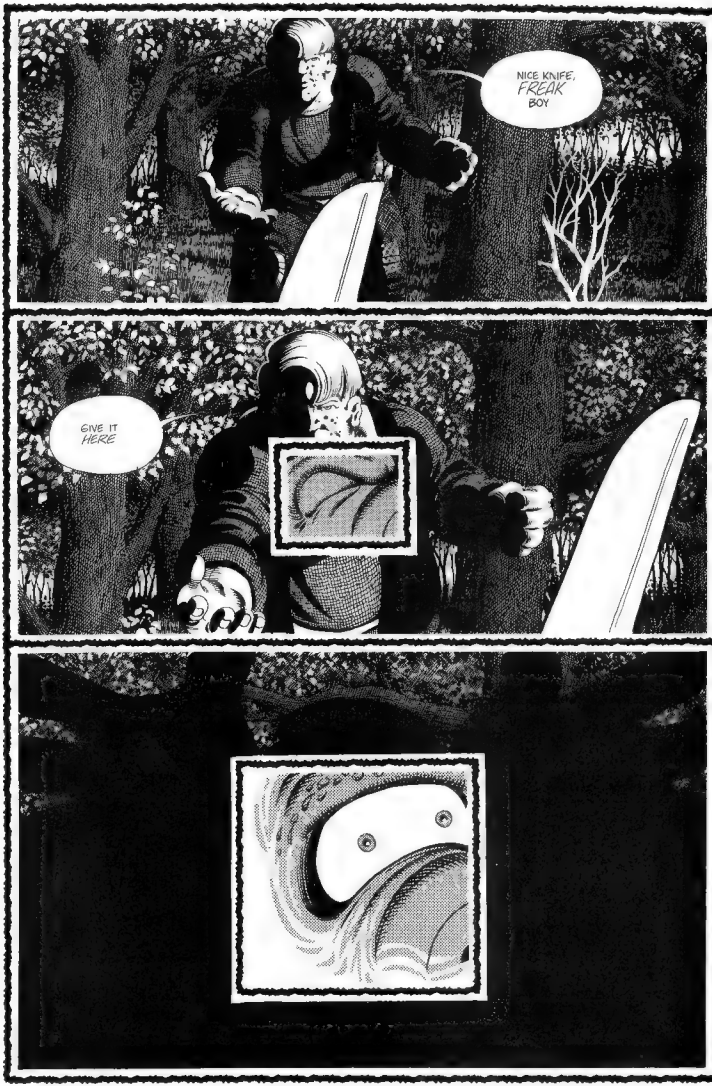
Remember.

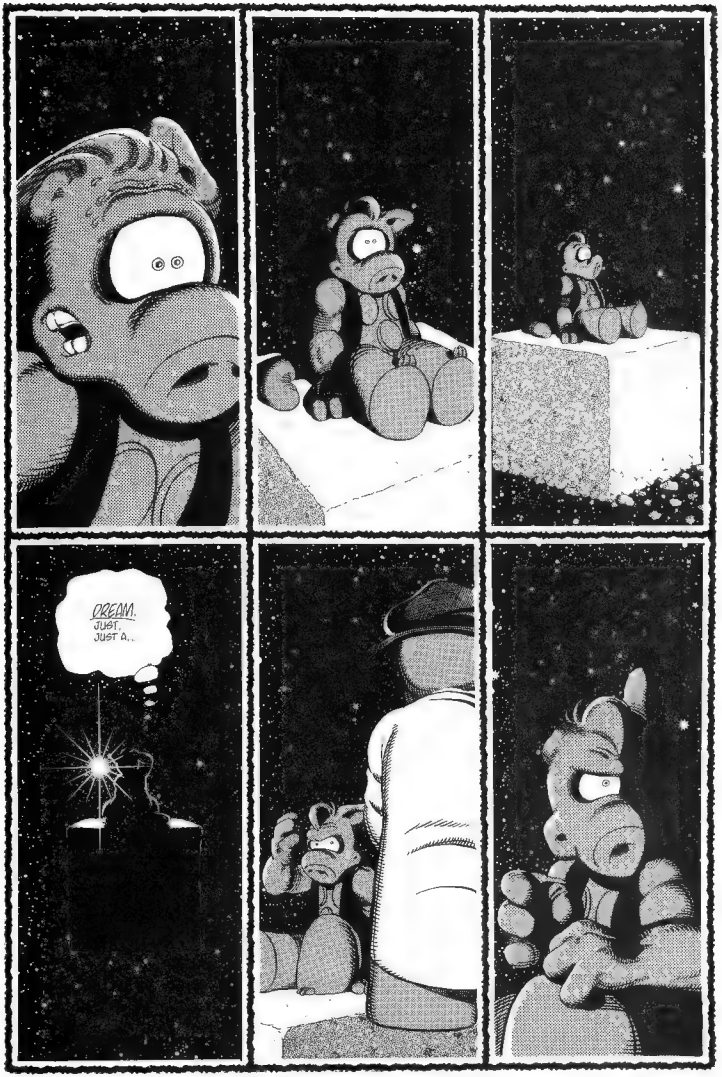
There's a war on.

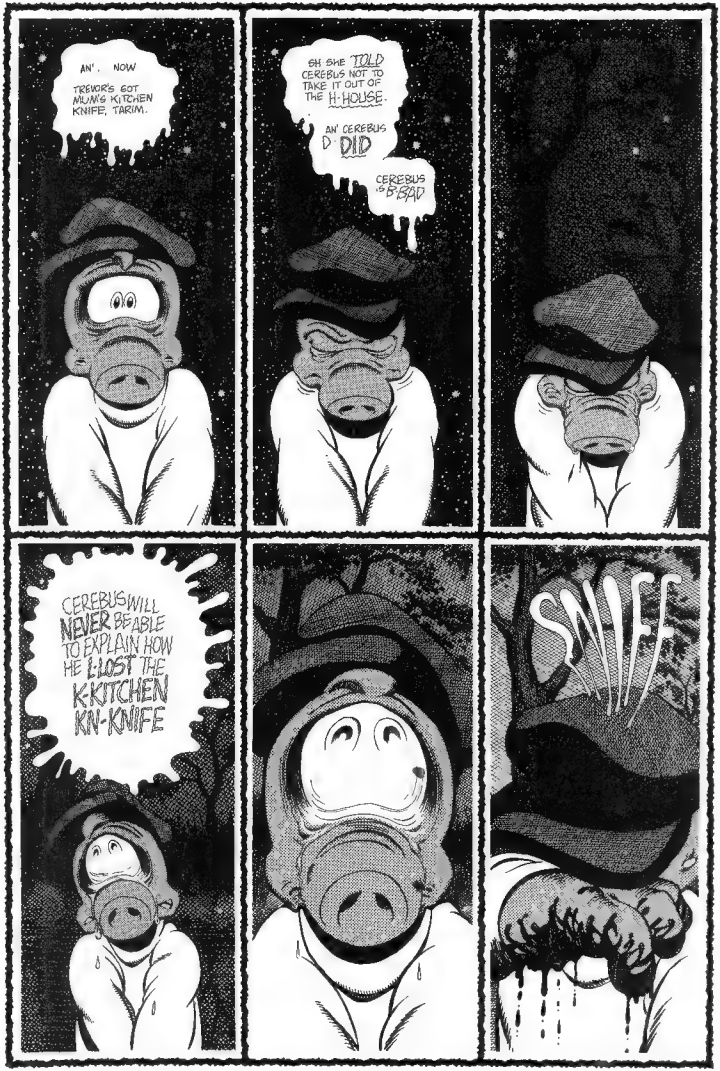


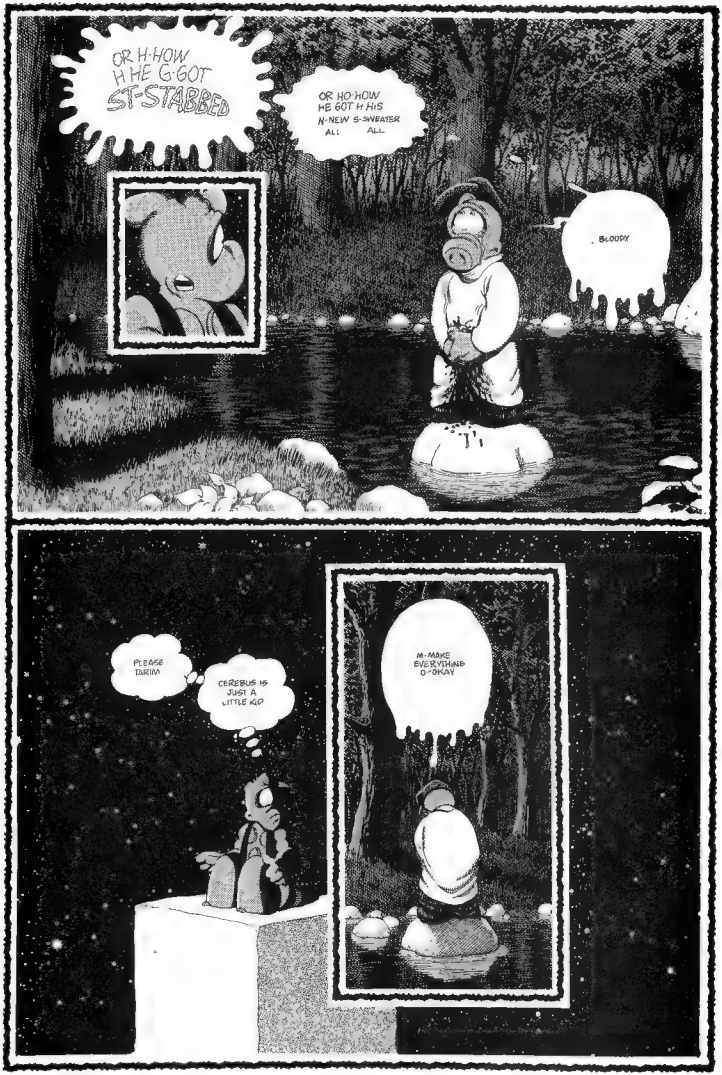


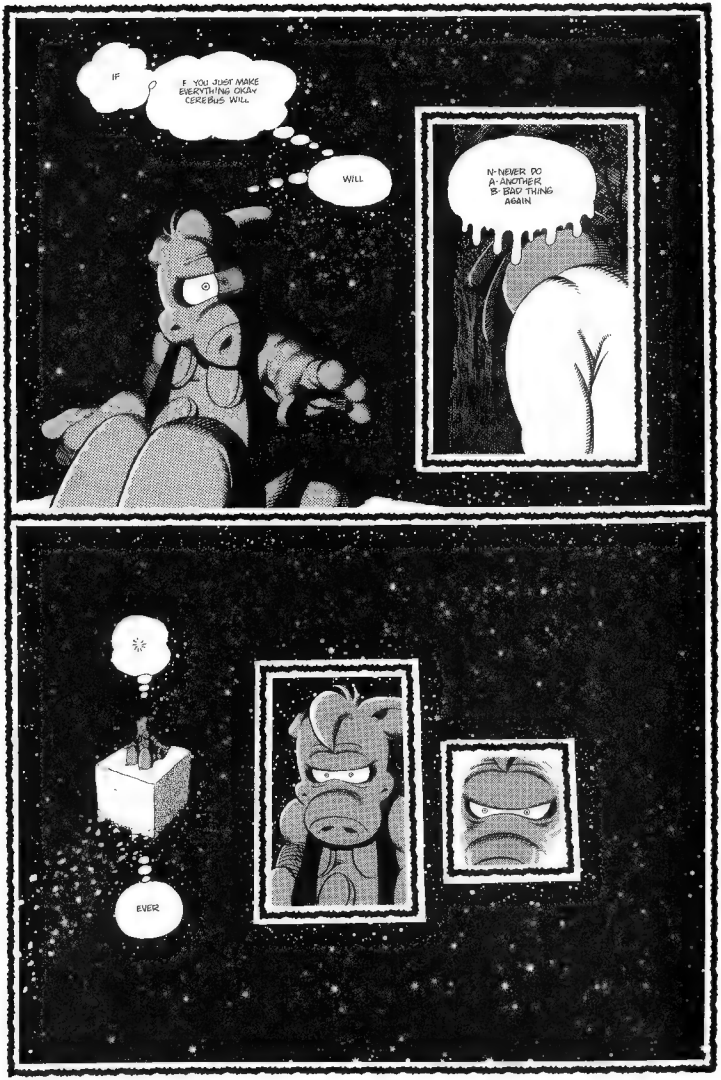

HEY.
HEY, FREAK BOY...

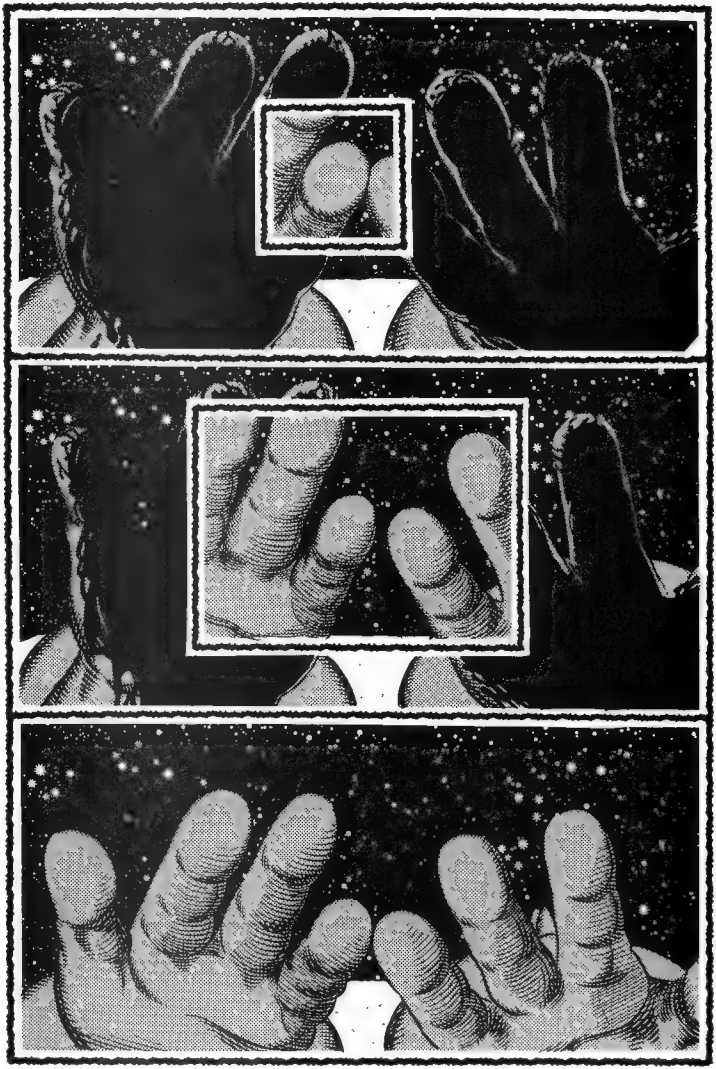

NICE KNIFE, FREAK BOY
GIVE IT HERE

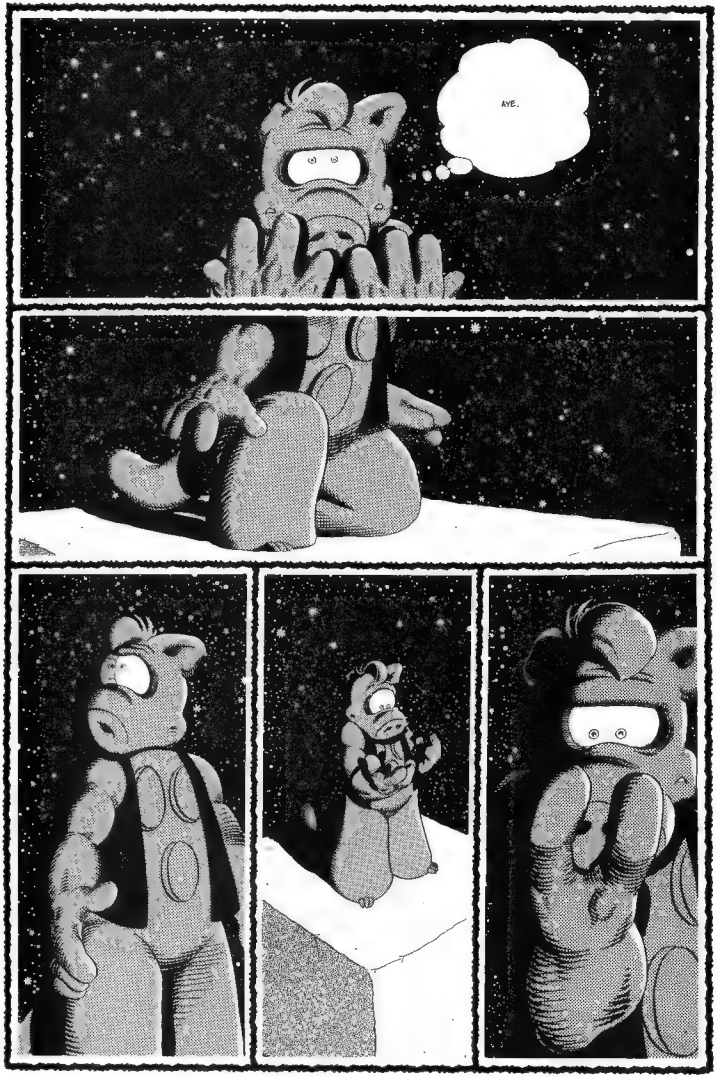

DREAM.
JUST
JUST A..


AN'. NOW TREVOR'S GOT MUM'S KITCHEN KNIFE, TARIM.
EH SHE TOLD CEREBUS NOT TO TAKE IT OUT OF THE H-HOUSE.
AN' CEREBUS D-DID
CEREBUS IS B-BAD
CEREBUS WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN HOW HE L-LOST THE K-KITCHEN KN-KNIFE
SNIFF

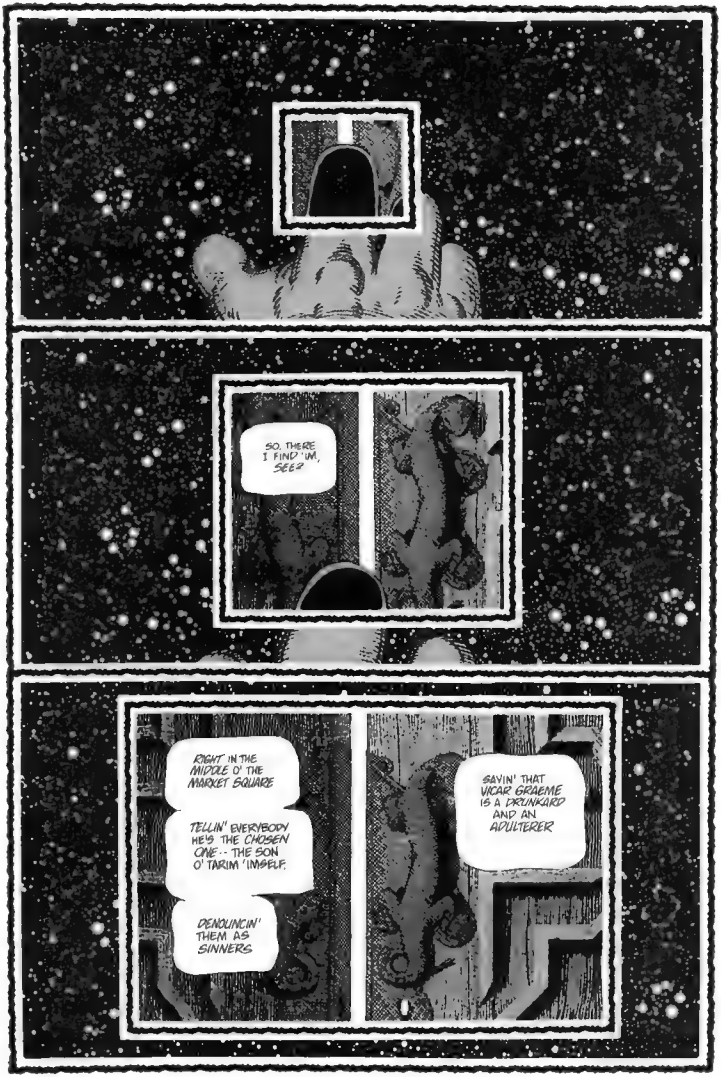

OR H-HOW H-HE G-GOT ST-STABBED
OR HO-HOW HE GOT H-HIS N-NEW S-SWEATER ALL ALL
BLOODY
M-MAKE EVERYTHING O-OKAY
PLEASE TARIM
CERBUS IS JUST A LITTLE KID


IF
IF YOU JUST MAKE EVERYTHING OKAY CEREBUS WILL
WILL
N-NEVER DO A-ANOTHER B-BAD THING AGAIN
EVER




AVE.

AYE


SO, THERE I FIND 'IM, SEE?
RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE O' THE MARKET SQUARE
TELLIN' EVERYBODY HE'S THE CHOSEN ONE -- THE SON O' TARIM 'IMSELF.
DENOUNCIN' THEM AS SINNERS
SAYIN' THAT VICAR GRAEME IS A DRUNKARD AND AN ADULTERER

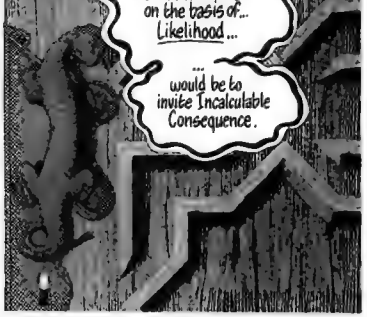
Vicar Graeme *is* a drunkard and an adulterer.
WELL, YEAH -- O'COURSE. EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT.
BUT Y'DON'T GO SHOUTING IT ALL OVER THE *MARKET SQUARE*

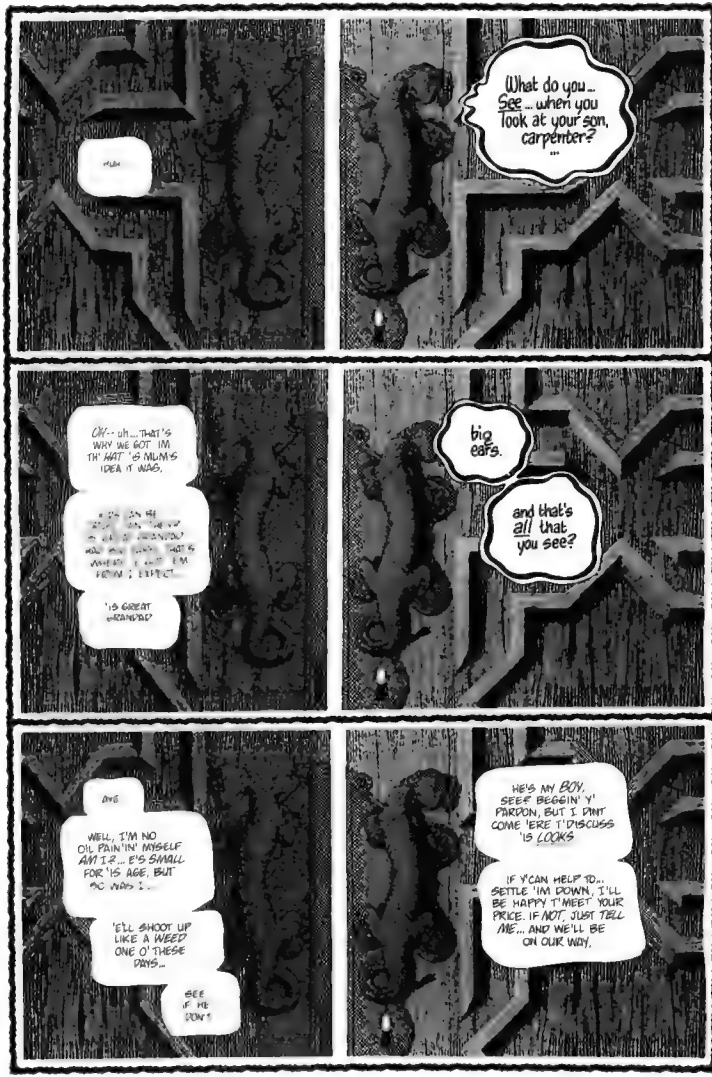
‡sigh‡ Why have you brought your son to me, carpenter?
WELL... YOU'RE A MAGICIAN I THOUGHT YOU KNOW...

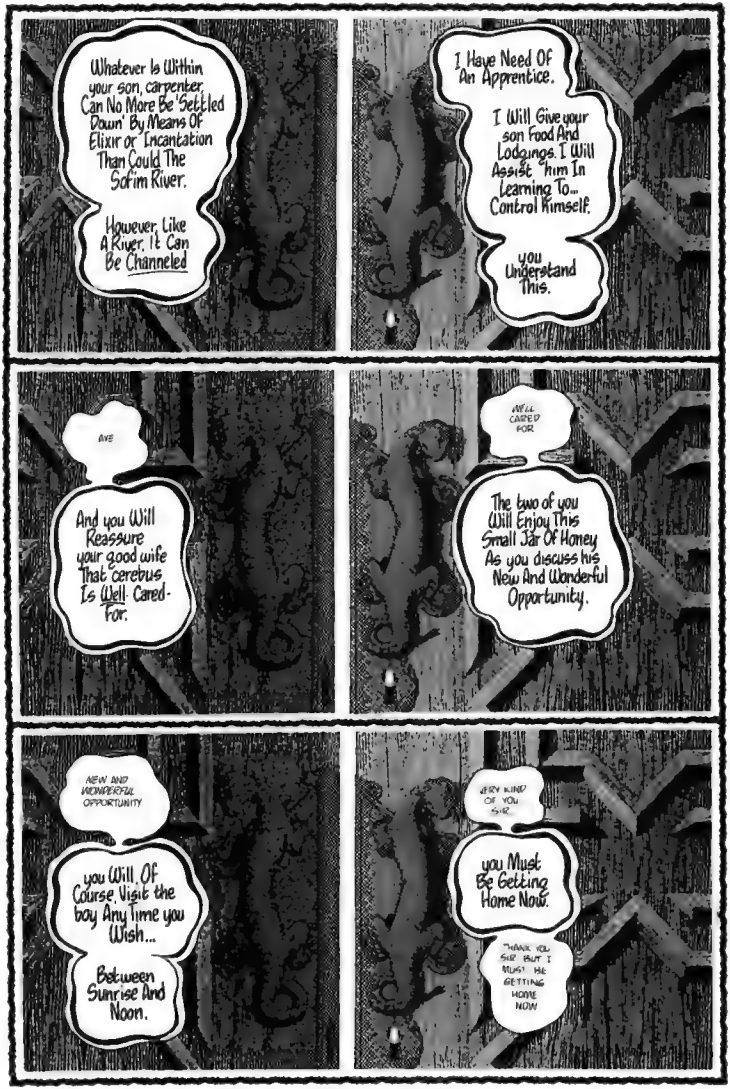
YOU'D HAVE A POTION OR A... SPELL OR SOMETHING
SETTLE 'IM DOWN A BIT SO 'E'S LIKE THE OTHER BOYS
I see.

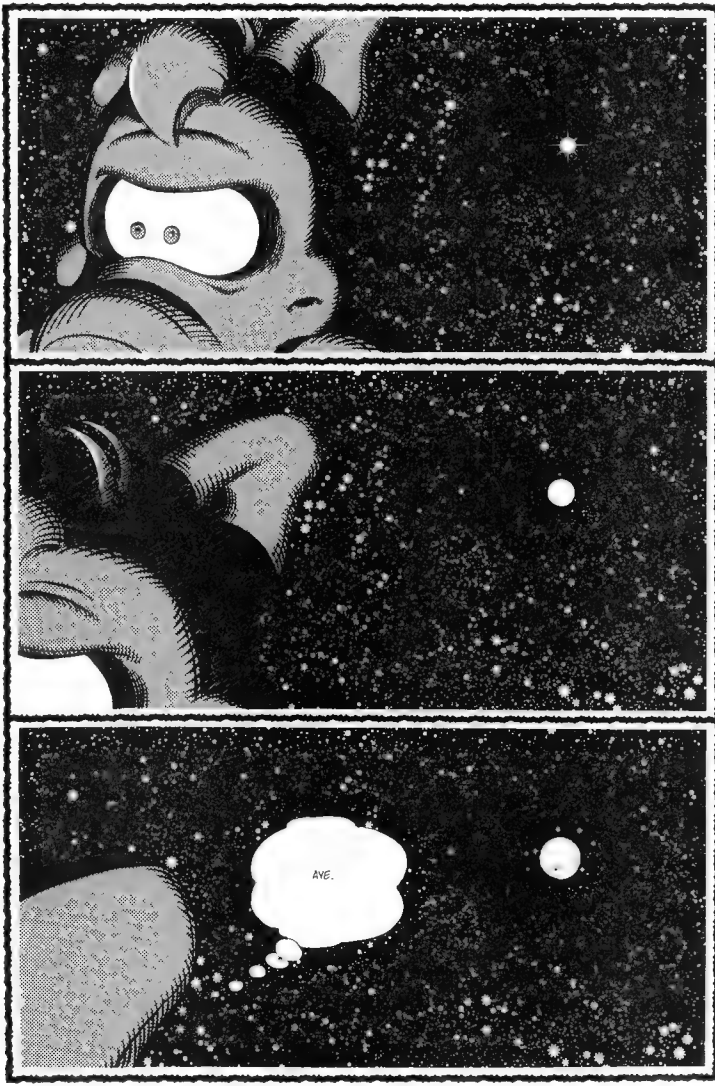
And what if your son is *correct*?
What if he *is* the chosen one?
AYE ?

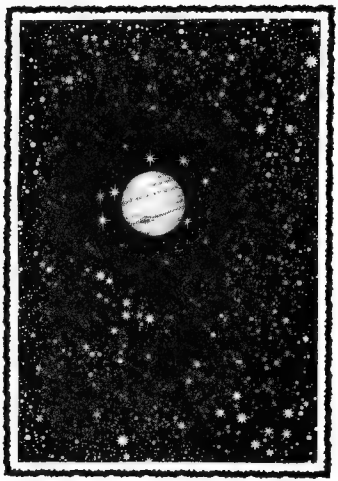
WOT ?
MY CEREBUS ? THE ... THE ... *WELL!*
I MEAN WHAT ARE THE ODDS O' THAT?
The Will of Tarim is not a dog race, carpenter.


To tamper with it To Miscalculate on the basis of... Likelihood...
... would be to invite Incalculable Consequence.


HUH
What do you... See... when you look at your son, carpenter?
...
OH-- uh... THAT'S WHY WE GOT 'IM TH' HAT 'IS MUM'S IDEA IT WAS.
big ears.
and that's all that you see?
'IS GREAT GRANDPA?
AYE
WELL, I'M NO OIL PAIN'IN' MYSELF AM I?... E'S SMALL FOR 'IS AGE, BUT SO WAS I...
'E'LL SHOOT UP LIKE A WEED ONE O' THESE DAYS...
SEE IF HE DON'T
HE'S MY BOY, SEEE BEGGIN' Y' PARDON, BUT I PINT COME 'ERE T' DISCUSS 'IS LOOKS
IF Y'CAN HELP TO... SETTLE 'IM DOWN, I'LL BE HAPPY T' MEET YOUR PRICE. IF NOT, JUST TELL ME... AND WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY.


Whatever is Within your son, carpenter, Can No More Be 'Settled Down' By Means Of Elixir or Incantation Than Could The Sofim River.
However, Like A River, It Can Be Channeled
I Have Need Of An Apprentice.
I Will Give your son Food And Lodgings. I Will Assist him In Learning To... Control Himself.
you Understand This.
AYE
And you Will Reassure your good wife That Cerebus Is Well Cared-For.
WELL CARED FOR
The two of you Will Enjoy This Small Jar Of Honey As you discuss his New And Wonderful Opportunity.
NEW AND WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY
you Will. Of Course, Visit the boy Any time you Wish...
Between Sunrise And Noon.
VERY KIND OF YOU SIR.
you Must Be Getting Home Now.
THANK YOU SIR BUT I MUST BE GETTING HOME NOW


AYE.



SPIRITS of INDEPENDENCE 1995

LOCAL LIAISONS:

FEBRUARY 19, 1995
AUSTIN, TEXAS
Martin Wagner, *Hepcats*
P.O. Box 27157
Austin, TX 78755-2157

MARCH 25, 1995
COLUMBUS, OHIO
Paul Pope, *THB*
P.O. Box 3112
Columbus, OH 43210-0112

APRIL 15, 1995
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
Drew Hayes, *Poison Elves*
P.O. Box 5844
Bellingham, WA 98227-5844

JULY 1, 1995
MANCHESTER, VERMONT
Steve Bissette, *Tyrant*
P.O. Box 442
Wilmington, VT 05363

AUGUST 12, 1995
WILMETTE, ILLINOIS
Larry Marder,
Tales of the Beanworld
P.O. Box 664, Wilmette, IL 60091

SEPTEMBER 9, 1995
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA
Don Simpson, *Bizarre Heroes*
P.O. Box 44326
Pittsburgh, PA 15205

OCTOBER 7, 1995
PHOENIX, ARIZONA
James Owen, *Starchild*
P.O. Box 40904
Mesa, AZ 85274

NOVEMBER 4, 1995
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
Richard Corben, *Den*
P.O. Box 8632
Kansas City, MO 64114

DECEMBER 3, 1995
KITCHENER, ONTARIO
Dave Sim, *Cerebus*
P.O. Box 1674, Station C
Kitchener, Ontario
CANADA N2G 4R2

Eight foot draped tables:
$15 ea. U.S. funds
$20 ea. Canadian

send cheque or
money order to:
Aardvark-Vanaheim Inc.
Box 1674, Station C
Kitchener, Ontario
Canada N2G 4R2
Fax: (519) 576-0955

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dear Dave,

O.K. I'll start with the basics, capped off with a few sweeping generalisations. And it's all down to you, Steph Green the misplaced midwesterner.

First off, we, the male of this sad species, tend to be more bigoted, slobbish and downright aggressive, whereas women tend to be more insidious, cunning and obsessed with playing mind games. I could go on for ages, but who really gives a flying fart.

Anyway, another great divide 'twixt man and the soft curvatious ones is our attitude to relationships; women seem to believe in a romanticised-rose-tinted view of love, as portrayed by Hollywood and Mills & Boon. Men tend to be more iconistic, worshipping their lover almost as a goddess. Net result: women who repeatedly fall in *LUST* want it to be the ultimate romance then duck out as soon as the glister fades away. Meanwhile, the poor man is left with his head in the clouds, still in love with the beautiful goddess image and trying to unravel the confusion left in this collapsed world.

Yes, Steph, you're right if "the bitch" is so flaky we shouldn't really get that arsed enough that we worry about it, but we do.

Thing is, that's the difference between men and women, statistically (and who the fuck works out these stats anyway) men are supposed to suffer twice as long after a breakup. To the man it's a kick in the balls each time as he realises that the perfect image he put on a pedestal has betrayed him. His whole belief system is cast into doubt: can he ever trust anyone again? How can he hope to find such sheer perfection as that he has lost? (If you need to chunder, now do so and get your breath back.) Everything ever said or done by the Ex is cast into doubt as he wonders how much was a stupid manipulative mind game and how much was just a downright lie.

By contrast women have it easy: if things don't work out then obviously he wasn't the real prince charming, it wasn't the ultimate romance; that is still to come and it'll hit like cupid's arrow. All will be perfect.

Yes, Steph, I'm a cynical wanker, but basically what I'm trying to say is that both sexes are screwed up, both have negative attitudes that they bring into relationships And, yes, men do tend to suffer more after a breakup, so rather than slag us off, why not try to understand us?

That said, I'm about to launch into my own little sob story. Get your hankies out, girls, this is a story of love, death and betrayal good enough for any French art movie.

Three years ago I met and fell in love with a woman whose name just happens to be Greek for goddess. We were soon engaged and living together with a couple of friends to share the rent. Everyone told us that we were great together. Her friends used to comment on how much happier and outgoing she had become. She was more confident than she had ever been; we were a team. I even pushed her so that she was back on talking terms with her mother. They're friends now but used to hate each other.

There was, however, one major problem, in my eyes. I wanted us to be equals, a perfect partnership. I know it takes a lot of hard work, but I was willing to try. She, on the other hand, was happy being doted on as a little princess without putting any effort into the relationship. You see, I was almost a surrogate father for the one who

left her to go off traveling.

In time I had to risk it. I couldn't keep being expected to do everything, so I slowed down in my affections. I know it sounds contrived, but I needed her to treat me as if she loved me too.

Bad mistake. Six months ago my life fell apart. In January my brother killed himself and our family was devastated. As a psychiatric nurse, the pressure was on me to be the strong one to support everyone else.

But I needed my fiancé there to support me. For the first time in our relationship, for the first time in my life, I needed someone. I needed her and she was not there for me. At that time there was a new person who was moving into our house and, rather than stay and support me, she said that she needed to get away, so she stayed at his old house for the night, leaving me abandoned.

A month to the day after my brother's death, she told me we were through. I now had two lots of grieving to do and my mind started racing, trying to work out exactly what had happened. Could I believe her reasons for leaving me? Did she ever really love me? I still don't know, but having lived so long with someone whom I thought I knew better than anyone, I realised that I can never truly trust anyone again.

Anyway, I moved into the study while I looked for a new place (I had to leave my home as her name was on the contract). Within two weeks of our split I started hearing noises of her screwing our lodger in the room next door.

Every night I couldn't sleep with the noise, and my head kept churning, wondering if he was the cause of our split. Should I kill him? Should I kill myself? Both options were out of the question — my life wasn't my own anymore. I was still needed by my parents and my patients, so I tried to give them the benefit of the doubt and slowly went mad.

In time I got a new life and sorted myself out. I tried to stay friends, but it was too uncomfortable. But when I finally told her that I couldn't cope with being around her anymore, she made things even worse by telling me that her affair had started the day after my brother died.

Now I'm left with weird feelings. Him I just hate. I had to do my hand in against a tree once just to stop myself from losing it and killing him. But with her it's so much worse. I love her and hate her at the same time, I feel betrayed and used, I can't trust women anymore because of her and yet I still worry about her, for I can see that her life is starting to go wrong and in a sense she is very alone in the world now. I pity her too, for she still hasn't learned that caring can be its own reward and that the more you put into a relationship the more you get out. Well, the glister has gone from her relationship now and I bet she repeats the same old patterns.

Yes, Steph, too many people don't bother about character or what's in the hearts of others, and too many people mope over what they have lost rather than looking ahead for what they can work for, but don't blame us men if we do mope a little. I for one think that sometimes I have a bloody right to.

The duality of life is that it can be both sodding awful and fucking fantastic at the same time. We must be aware of both at the same time, understanding and learning from one and relishing the other. That is often the curse and the blessing of people with bipolar disorders, their genius and their suffering.

And, yes, a mate without sympathy is like a Hollywood character or a statue of a goddess.

Steph, fare well in the midwest of wherever and, Dave, tell the Earthpig he's a cute mo-fo.

Yours,

Mr. Punch

P.S. As a man I have always found being called cute, sweet or nice by a woman I fancy most annoying, as it usually leads to the classic "I like you, but I just want us to be friends." This is usually said by women who complain that they wish all their lovers could be more like friends but always end up with the ugliest of wankers who treat them badly.

The other annoying phrase is "I need more space," which always means that they're ending the relationship because they're shagging someone else. This has happened to me and loads of my friends recently, with those exact words.

Don't you just hate a cop-out?

Well, look at it this way: if you had a world full of potential suitors clamouring for you, wouldn't you a) jump around quite a bit before picking one, b) pick one temporarily, c) ditch the one you picked at the first sign of obligation, d) eliminate the unwanted candidates from competition, e) pick the one who's the least likely to get hurt when you ditch (i.e., a real asshole)? Maybe not, but I think that's the majority pattern that we're facing.

★★★★★★★★★

Dave:

It's taken me a while to get to this. Been really busy. Anyway, since you specifically asked — been with you since sometime in 1978, from issue one. I've only written you once before, to ask permission to use the title "Square One" for one of my band's songs. Shortly after you wrote back (when was that — 1990? Something like that), our vocalist got shipped off to jail for half a year, effectively killing the band.

So. Here I am. It's 11:50 P.M., and I still have lots of Sturm-Liouville boundary-value problems to do (does anybody else out there do Fourier series?). I hate summer classes. Clearly, I should write you instead.

What should I write about? Maybe I'll tell you about my weekend. The only notable part of it was some party I went to with my best friend here, Rick. He likes beer. I like Jack Daniels (Lobo's comment in his "Paramilitary Christmas Special" seems appropriate — "the fast track t' the only possible outcome"). So here we are at the party, butt trashed. I'm strategically located next to the keg, when these two hair-spray bimbos come up and start talking to me: "Hraawhnna nownna na na..." or something. The room was spinning. They were cute, though. At least, I think they were. I was staring at the one chick's cleavage, trying to think of something timely to say. Alas. Nothing was forthcoming. Then up stumbles Rick (Well, here's where I have to explain about Rick. He's fairly bright and all: majoring in nuclear engineering, but he calls himself the "eighth ninja," and thinks he is. We usually end up in head-butting contests at parties or bars.), who stammers something like, "So! What are you girls into?" I inwardly cringe at these words, but take heart when they start talking about some hippie love crap. I was about to spring with "Love? Really? Hey, we are

too!" Unfortunately, before this could happen, Rick goes, "Peace and love?! What shit!! We're into WAR, and DEATH, and PAIN!!" at which point he snarls and gives me a reverse punch to the stomach. Fortunately, via much conditioning, I was prepared for it; unfortunately, Rick's pickup line didn't score so well with the babes, who promptly split the scene. At least I still had the keg in check.

Opinions about *Reads*? What for? If one or two people didn't like it, would you change it? If the majority thought it was crap and stopped buying your book, would you change it? I hope not. I remember a Wilde quote on the back of issue whatever along those lines. If some hyper-insightful well-meaning person wrote you a critical letter, would your ego let you change it? I hope not. I hate fucking sellouts. This is **your** book, isn't it?

Ohman ohman. It's getting late. Maybe Professor Hunt will take tomorrow off. Maybe not. I'd better sign off.

Max Bareither
Purdue University
118 Sylvia St., Apt. #4
West Lafayette, IN
USA 47906

You have no idea how secure I feel that Rick has chosen nuclear engineering for his career.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Just got *Cerebus* 184 (thank you — marvellous as always) and was struck by the inordinate (even by Aardvark Comment standards) number of "how-could-my-dream-girl-DO-this-to-me?!" letters from lovelorn young lads. Sigh. May I take some of the heat off you and offer a few observations? My pleasure.

1.) The reason girls have "fan clubs" is because they can. Women do have the upper hand in this dating thing because men make it all too obvious; they will do anything to get some pussy. Don't get bitter — just put yourself in their shoes, then ask if you can really blame them. Because sex is easier for a woman to get than it is for a man, it is naturally less of a big deal for them. Any woman will tell you she will be more attracted to a man who acts like he doesn't care one way or another. So chill out, and you guys will suddenly find (gasp!) *they're* chasing *you*.

2.) Women sometimes abuse their privileges, so don't let the venality of a single bimbo sour you to all womanhood. (After all, we certainly don't appreciate the anti-male stereotypes feminists have been sticking on us.) Axiom: "No matter how good-looking she is, someone, somewhere, is sick of her shit."

There. Now you guys are all set. Go forth and boff.

See you in Dallas, Dave. (I figure I'll give you yours and Ger's copies of *Hepcats* 12 there.) Oh, and, if you need help with these poor fellows again, just let me know, okay?

Yours,

Martin Wagner
Double Diamond Press
Deep in the Art of Texas
P.O. Box 27157
Austin, TX
USA 78765-2157

***Many* someones. *Many* somewheres. Words to live by, Martin. Thanks.**

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I just finished reading #184.

What are you guys up to, Dave? Are you telling us Cerebus might only make it to #200? Are you going to kill off the little guy?

Well, if that is the case, then I can't say I'm real happy about it. But you're the author and Cerebus is your creation. I'm just glad I got to be along for some of the ride. Who knows? Maybe you're just kidding us or trying to frighten us. Right? Time and the next several issues will tell. But I still hope you're planning on issue 300.

And this brings up a question I'm sure I won't be the first to ask. What plans (artistically speaking), if any, do you have once *Cerebus* is finished? Just curious. You might not have any plans besides retirement of sorts. Or you might not want to tell anyone. Or it could be that it is none of our damn business.

Oh, before I forget. Thanks for publishing my letter in #184. It was my first.

I've been scanning *Cerebus* since about issue 60 or so, but I was never a regular reader until fairly recently. I had a vague idea of the story lines but found them confusing (probably because I didn't read *Cerebus* monthly). A couple of years ago a buddy of mine gave me the first reprint, *Cerebus*, and I read it and thought it was pretty good, though not necessarily great. When I was finished, he said, "Here's *High Society*. It's better." I read that one too and was just blown away. The art had improved. The story was excellent. Then my friend handed me both parts of *Church and State*. "It gets even better," he said. "Bullshit," I thought, "it *can't* get any better." But it did. Since then I have been a fan. I've borrowed the other phone books from friends and like them also, though *Church and State* is still my favorite. *Mothers and Daughters* could outdo *Church and State*, though.

Recently I came across some extra funds and I decided enough was enough. I wanted the phone books. So I ordered them. All of them. Which is a little crazy. When I called, the guy who took my order was very nice, casual and seemed pretty cool. I figured he was just some flunky you guys had in the office, maybe some college kid working for the summer or something. But I asked him for his name. I like to do that sort of thing sometimes, especially if I think I might be dealing with this person again (ie., I'll be ordering *Reads* when it comes out). "Oh, I'm Gerhard," he said. I was stunned. I admit it. I bring all of this up because it is nice to know that Dave Sim and Gerhard answer their own calls. It's nice to know that you guys don't think of yourselves as some sort of great artistic royalty who are above and beyond your readers.

Now, about women. A female friend of mine has been in a relationship that has been off-and-on for the last year or so. She calls me up wanting to know why he does this or why he does that and why can't things work out. I've tried to explain things to her as nicely as I could. I've also been hard and nasty toward her when I thought she deserved it. To her we just have "male bullshit egos." Maybe. Maybe not. Call it that if you want. But, dammit, we've got it and most of us are probably going to keep it. I don't mind being sensitive to a woman when it is called for. I don't mind being nice to her. I don't mind buying flowers. I don't mind taking a woman to dinner or her taking me to dinner. But I **DO** mind having to change my whole way of thinking just because it doesn't suit her and because she doesn't

understand it. Enough on this subject for now.

I guess I'll end here. There's a couple of bottles of Samuel Smith's waiting for me. Keep up the good work and thanks for paying attention.

Tyrone Johnston
1911 Western Avenue
Apt. 11F
Chillicothe, OH
USA 45601-1051

Yeah. Like 'leaving the toilet seat up'. Who fucking decided that the 'down' position is the right one? 'Yo, bitch. You left the toilet seat down again.'

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave—

It's amazing how long you can forget things, things that used to be the most important thing in your life. How the emotion and feeling just lie, dormant, underneath your everyday life, sleeping. Then all it takes is a little nudge, a little reminder to bring it all back, and make it all seem as fresh and uninterrupted as if it had happened yesterday.

I was cleaning my room today (a rare occurrence) when I came across a tiny piece of paper. It was a schedule of classes, printed on the green and white paper so typical of my school system. It was dated 1/23, the year I was in 8th grade.

But it wasn't my schedule.

That year, not wanting to take any of the stupid electives that are offered to 8th-graders, not yet responsible enough to learn any *real* skills, I had gotten out of Home Ec by volunteering to be the Assistant Principal's teacher assistant. Which basically meant shuffling papers once a week or so and using the rest of the time to finish assignments, talk to friends, or, when she wasn't in the room, mess around on the school's phone system.

That was also the year that this girl, whom I happened to have a crush on, moved away to Cincinnati. And I mean crush in the fullest sense of the word.

I still remember spending Science and Algebra class (periods 3+4, according to the schedule) sitting at my desk, staring at her the whole period. The teachers would drone on about quadratic equations, and parabolic curves, and weather patterns. But I would be paying attention to patterns of my own, staring at far more interesting curves all period long. Memorizing her smile, her laugh, her legs, her ti... Ahem.

I can recall a ploy me and another friend (everybody admitted she was very good-looking) had worked out, where we would yawn, loudly, stretching with many dramatics. And, almost every blessed time, due to the contagiousness of yawns, she would stretch arms above her head, tilt backwards, and arch her back, in a subconscious sign of her boredom.

To prepare for the move, she left school a few days early to pack and such. The day after she left was one of the strangest days I had ever lived through. I stared at the empty chair where she had sat just a day ago. I can't describe the feeling... it was like walking down the street, coming back from the store, with your load of groceries, and realizing that your house is no longer there. Just an empty lot, a barren strip of ground. An integral part of your life, just... gone.

I waded through the classes, and lunch was just as bad. There was no one to shock with our sexist jokes, no one to harass (God, I shudder to think what could happen nowadays... I could get expelled for all those times we threw pennies down her shirt). No one to even out the teams during the basketball game. It was like the entire day was off-kilter somehow.

So during the last period of the day, my TA period, I stole her schedule out of the box that contained the schedules of the entire school. We had been friends, but not very close. We talked in class, and at lunch, but nothing ever really extended past school.

So I stole the schedule to get her phone number. I needed some final good-bye. So I called her when I got home (one of the most courageous acts of my little grade eight accomplishments) and asked her if she wanted to go to a movie me and two of my other friends were going to that night. She said yes, and to call back in about an hour. So I did.

No answer.

The day after, she left.

I never saw her again.

I never heard her voice again.

We corresponded by mail for about a year, exchanging letters every month or so, but that fell apart.

We were in completely different worlds, and we didn't have a strong enough friendship to sustain a cross-continent friendship. And talking to her other friends, I discovered neither did they.

So, now, I had thought I had moved past her, left that part of me in the past. But I guess not. I guess she left a more permanent mark than I can ever comprehend. She got under my skin. And so few people do that once you are there, you can never quite get away.

Zobnek

Run faster.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Ian Leach sent a submission to DC and they returned it. This he wouldn't have minded were it not for the accompanying letter which stated that his ideas were quote "boring" unquote. Ian has now quit writing and will never publish *Ravenswolf* again. We all miss Ian greatly and I'm banking on him seeing his name in *Cerebus* to get him back on board again.

Thanks, chum!

Peter Ashton
161 Desborough Road
Eastleigh
SO50 5NP, UK

P.S. I didn't buy *Cerebus* for most of 1993–4 for no reason in particular but recently bought 172 up. 'S good to be back, Dave. It's damn good to be back.

To paraphrase Fred Allen: If you took all of the ideas at DC and put them into a thimble, you'd have room left over for all of the integrity in work-made-for-hire comics and a publisher's heart.

Ian. Don't be such a putz. Getting rejected by DC is a badge of honour. Wear it proudly, man.

1996 CEREBUS WORLD TOUR

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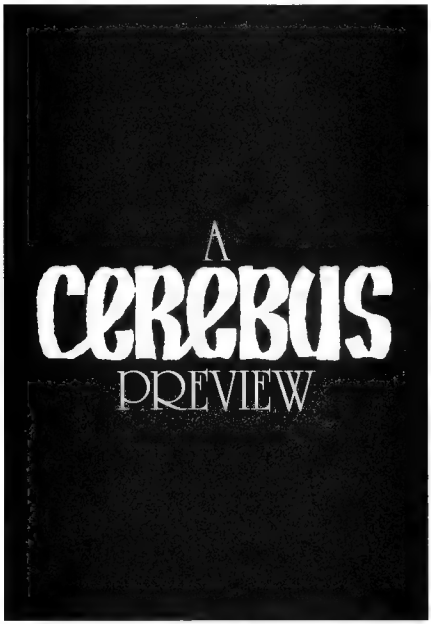
FRANCE • ENGLAND
GERMANY • AUSTRALIA

AND MORE

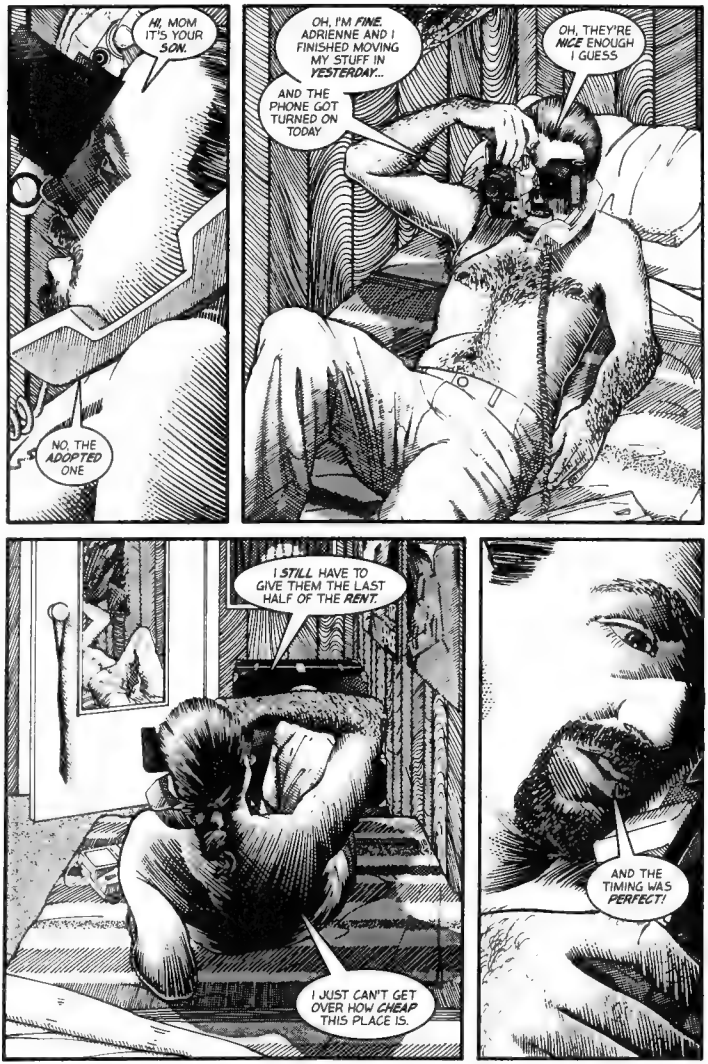


I first saw Stephen Blue's work in the pages of Bissette's *TABOO* ('Blue Angel' in volume four). Being, myself, from the 'clean and crisp' school of comic-book illustration, I was very impressed with Stephen's composition, rendering, and use of light and shadow. He sent me this story in its earlier incarnation (published by Dano V. of Slave Labor) as well as photocopies of the balance of the story when he completed it. The biggest problem that I faced in selectng pages for this Preview was choosing among a field of very, very strong candidates. There is genuine innovation here — the whiplash impact of sudden gestures and transitions coupled with a meticulous sense of 'finish': an *extremely* rare combination in the field. I think the nine pages that follow will whet your appetite for the rest of *Red River* (it's a 96-page squarebound graphic novel) and make you as eager as I am for Stephen's next project (whatever that might be).

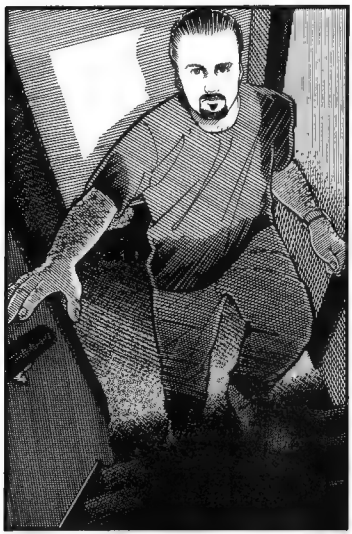
Stephen Blue, Blue Comics Ink, 61 E. 8th St. #256, New York, NY 10003 $9.95 US (cheque or money order; add $2 for postage and handling).

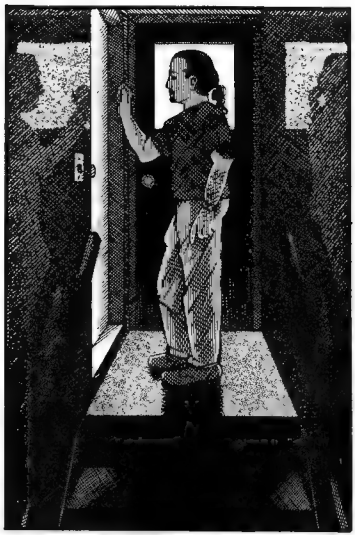
★★★★★★★★★★

Red River was published with the assistance of a grant from the Xeric Foundation. Those interested in applying for a grant to assist in start-up in self-publishing can write for information: The Xeric Foundation, 351 Pleasant #214, Northampton, MA 01060.

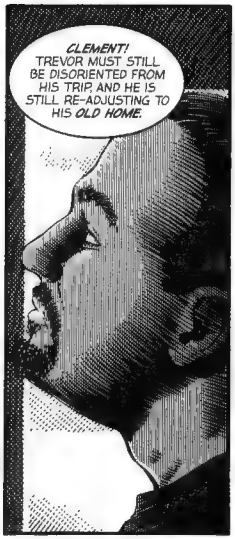

HI, MOM IT'S YOUR SON.
NO, THE ADOPTED ONE
OH, I'M FINE. ADRIENNE AND I FINISHED MOVING MY STUFF IN YESTERDAY...
AND THE PHONE GOT TURNED ON TODAY
OH, THEY'RE NICE ENOUGH I GUESS
I STILL HAVE TO GIVE THEM THE LAST HALF OF THE RENT.
I JUST CAN'T GET OVER HOW CHEAP THIS PLACE IS.
AND THE TIMING WAS PERFECT!

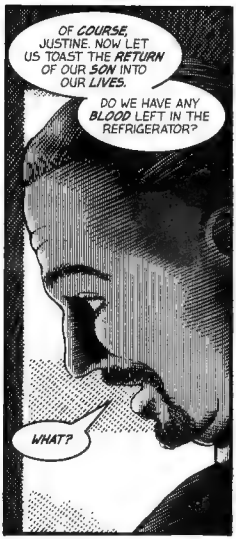
OH, SHE'S FINE.
I DON'T KNOW...
I JUST THINK OUR RELATIONSHIP HAS BECOME SORT OF...
...TERMINAL.
DAMN!
FELIX?





COME NOW TREVOR...YOU HAVE BEEN BACK FOR TWENTY DAYS AND HAVE ONLY SPOKEN TWENTY-NINE WORDS THUS FAR.
SORRY
THIRTY


CLEMENT! TREVOR MUST STILL BE DISORIENTED FROM HIS TRIP, AND HE IS STILL RE-ADJUSTING TO HIS OLD HOME.


OF COURSE, JUSTINE. NOW LET US TOAST THE RETURN OF OUR SON INTO OUR LIVES.
DO WE HAVE ANY BLOOD LEFT IN THE REFRIGERATOR?
WHAT?

HELLO.
uhhh HI, CLEMENT. um... I WAS STOPPING BY TO DROP OFF THE REST OF THE RENT.
THAT IS JUST FINE, FELIX.
IN FACT THERE IS SOMEONE HERE YOU SHOULD MEET.
FELIX, THIS IS TREVOR.
HI.

IT IS A PLEASURE TO FINALLY MEET YOU, FELIX
uh... YEAH.
I HAVE HEARD A GREAT DEAL ABOUT YOU
I GUESS I CAN'T REALLY SAY THE SAME.
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW CLEMENT AND JUSTINE HAD A SON.
OH. YES, OF COURSE
HE HAS JUST RETURNED FROM A TRIP ...ABROAD
OH YEAH? FROM WHERE?
FRANCE. HE HAS JUST RETURNED FROM FRANCE.

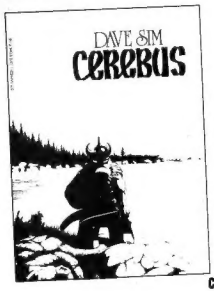
DON'T FORGET, PAM...THE MOST IMPORTANT RULE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IS...
YOU SEE IT BEFORE YOU HEAR IT.
HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT?
A FACE NOT EVEN A MOTHER COULD LOVE.
YIKES!

SAY, FELIX, DID YOU HEAR ABOUT REBECCA PAULSON?
WHAT ABOUT HER?
SOMEONE FOUND HER IN THE RIVER THIS MORNING...
DEAD.
I...
YEAH. AND NOW PEOPLE ARE WONDERING IF BETH OLSON'S DEATH WAS AN ACCIDENT.
I...
SAY, DIDN'T YOU ALL GO TO THE SAME HIGH SCHOOL?
I..

I...I WENT OUT WITH REBECCA FOR OVER A YEAR.
BETH AND I ALMOST GOT MARRIED RIGHT OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL.
OH, WOW.
I'M SORRY, FELIX. I DIDN'T KNOW.
I KNEW ABOUT BETH. I JUST CAN'T BELIEVE...
FELIX...

PAM...!...
I'M SORRY. I KNOW YOU HAVE A GIRLFRIEND...
AND YOU PROBABLY DON'T EVEN...
WELL..
LET'S JUST FORGET IT OKAY?
SURE.
FELIX... ARE THOSE ELECTION PHOTOS DONE YET?

CEREBUS: THE FIRST HALF

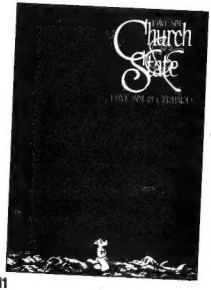


CEREBUS reprints Cerebus 1 to 25
500 pages $25

The Cerebus volume introduces the cast of characters including Elrod the Albino, Red Sophia, Jaka, the Cockroach (later Captain Cockroach with Elrod as Bunky the Albino), Lord Julius, President Weisshaupt and many more.

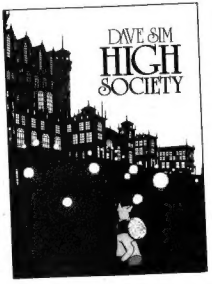
HIGH SOCIETY reprints Cerebus 26 to 50
500 pages $25

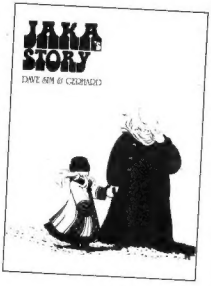
Cerebus gets swept up into the world of high power politics in lest and runs for Prime Minister. Introduces Astoria, Filgate, Blakely, the Regency Elf, Dirty Fleagle and his brother Dirty Drew McGrew, Duke Leonardi. The Roach becomes Moon Roach and Sergeant Preston of the Royal Mounted lestan police.



CHURCH & STATE Vol. I & II reprints Cerebus 52 to 111
1200 pages $30 ea.

One of the longest single stories in the history of comics. Manipulated by President Weisshaupt, Cerebus finds himself married and then finds himself as Pope of the Eastern Church! Introduces Mrs. Henrot-Gutch (Cerebus' mother-in-law), Boobah, Bear, Bishop Powers, Bishop Posey, Mick and Keef and many more. The Roach becomes Wolveroach and the Secret Sacred Wars Roach. Also, in volume II, is the Flaming Carrot cross-over.



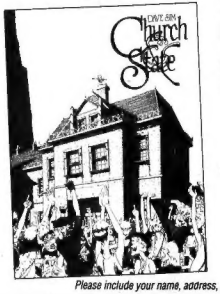


JAKA'S STORY reprints Cerebus 114 to 136
500 pages $25

Cerebus returns to find his life in ruins and ends up as a houseguest of the love of his life, Jaka, and her new husband Rick. Introduces Oscar the poet, Pud, the tavern-owner, and Mrs. Thatcher.

MELMOTH reprints Cerebus 139 to 150
250 pages $17

Cerebus, mistakenly believing that Jaka is dead, takes up residence in Dino's Cafe, clutching Jaka's childhood doll, Missy and his sword. The other half of the story is a faithful retelling of the last days of Oscar Wilde. The Roach becomes normalroach. Introduces Doris, Dino, Janice, Robbie and Reggie. Cameo appearances by Mick and Keef.



and

CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO
(reprinting the 'in-between' stories from Cerebus 51, 112/113 and 137-138) ($2.25)

PHONE ORDERS (Visa and Mastercard)
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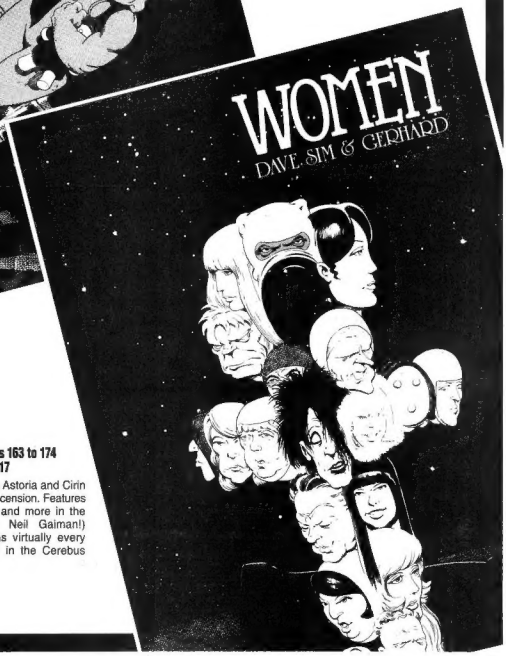
Aardvark Vanaheim inc.,
P.O. Box 1674, Station C,
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 4R2

Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, Visa or Mastercard number & expiration date and name on the card.

THE SECOND HALF BEGINS HERE

FLIGHT reprints Cerebus 151 to 162
250 pages $17

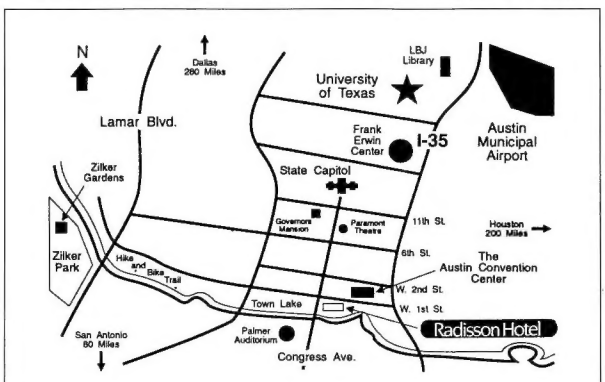
Cerebus explodes into action in the second half of the 300 issue story-line. Trapped in lest, hunted by the Cirinists, Cerebus battles back. Featuring Punisherroach as well as the unexpected reappearance of many early Cerebus characters, including the first (visual) appearance of Suenteus Po!



WOMEN reprints Cerebus 163 to 174
250 pages $17

The second half continues as Astoria and Cirin contend for the fabled Final Ascension. Features Swoon, Snuff, Sleaze, Sulk and more in the highly-acclaimed (even by Neil Gaiman!) Sandman parody, as well as virtually every female character introduced in the Cerebus storyline to date.

SPIRITS of INDEPENDENCE



AUSTIN, TEXAS

Okay.

'Big Picture' is done. Front cover is pasted up; back cover is pasted up. This is the last stop, folks (for Austin, anyway). Seeing as how I'm writing this in the third week of November, I'm knocking on wood that no great problem has arisen by the time you're reading this.

The map (above) isn't the best in the world, but it should help those of you who are driving in from somewhere else. Here are the names of those of us who are trying to put this whole thing together:

Martin Wagner
DOUBLE DIAMOND PRESS
P.O. Box 27157, Austin, Texas 78755-2157
(512) 837-5545 / Internet address: hepcats@eden.com

The Retailer du Jour is our old pal John Christian of PAPER HEROES. He'll have two or three tables at the event with self-published, small-press and mini-comics stuff, as well as an assortment of 'cutting edge' mainstream material. It's his call as to what he decides to display. It's your call to pitch your books to him. Send sample copies to:

John Christian
c/o PAPER HEROES
204–D Fort Hood Road, Killeen, Texas 76541
(817) 628-1515

If you can't make it to the event, you can send flyers to John at the above address and we'll have them on display for easy picking at the door. He'll also be supplying the admission-table staff, so let's have a nice round of applause for John, eh?

As far as accommodations go, for those who might find the Radisson a bit 'pricey', Martin says there's quite a string of motels out on I-35, including a couple of candidates for those of you who like to have everything nailed down tight before you hit the road:

La Quinta North
7100 I–35 North
(512) 452-9401

La Quinta Highland Mall
5812 I–35 North
(512) 459-4381

La Quinta Capitol
(closest to the Radisson)
300 E. 11th St.
(512) 476-1166

★★★★★★★★★★

Martin's setting up a little Après Event party at SCHOLZ GARTEN (achtung, baby), which is about a five-minute drive from the Radisson. From the Radisson head down Congress Avenue towards the Capitol. Turn right on 11th. Take a left on Trinity, another left on 18th and ANOTHER left on San Jacinto. The address is 1607 San Jacinto, between 16th and 17th Streets... probably the only bar in town with a Historical Marker on it. This is the joint where Martin and Shannon and their cartooning pals do jam mini-comics and stuff every Wednesday night, so they're used to us folks. Everyone is welcome. The room holds two hundred. When you walk in the front door, it's on the left (just past the restrooms). Phone number is (512) 477-4171. Cash bar. Live music.

★★★★★★★★★★

And, of course, there's your last-ditch hope: me. The tables are going fast but you can find out just how many are left by calling or faxing (preferably):

Dave Sim
Aardvark-Vanaheim Inc.
P.O. Box 1674, Stn. C, Kitchener, ON, CANADA N2G 4R2
Phone: (519) 576-0610 • Fax: (519) 576-0955

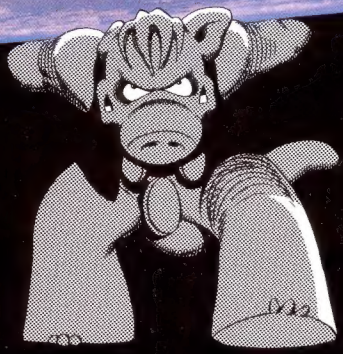
Likewise for booking tables for the future SPIRITS OF INDEPENDENCE: March 25: Columbus, Ohio... April 15: Seattle, Washington... July 1: Manchester, Vermont... August 12: Chicago, Illinois... September 9: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania... October 7: Phoenix, Arizona... November 4: Kansas City, Missouri... December 3 (please note changed date): Kitchener, Ontario.

DAVE SIM & GERHARD

AUSTIN TEXAS

FEBRUARY 19, 1995
11am to 6pm

MARTIN WAGNER
HEPCATS



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